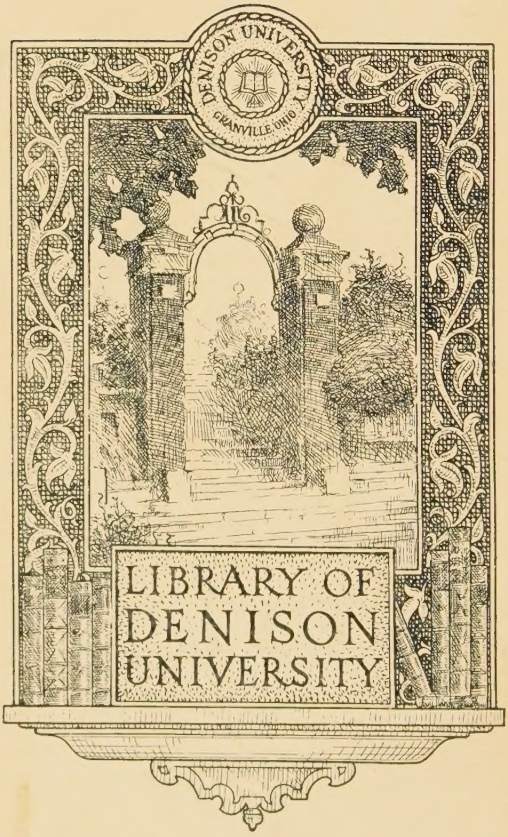
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NAPOLEON'S CAMPAIGN OF 1812 AND THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW

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AND THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW

By

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NAPOLEON'S CAMPAIGN OF 1812

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TO

CONSTANTINE BECKENDORFF

PREFACE

THIS book was written in the year 1912, the centenary year of the Retreat from Moscow. It first appeared (for the most part) in the shape of articles published by the *Pall Mall Gazette* of that date, and was largely written upon the sites of the campaign which it describes. At the moment when the work was undertaken two conditions limited it and marked it, which two conditions have since disappeared. First, warfare was still in two dimensions (if one may use that shorthand expression); the new factor which has, for the first time in human history, affected strategy itself, strategy which had hitherto been thought immutable—action in the air—was not known. Secondly, the campaign described had been undertaken upon a scale which still, after a century, remained the maximum effort in numbers of a united Command.

The Great War of 1914 has destroyed both these conditions. Nevertheless the arguments and the descriptions applied to Napoleon's vast undertaking of a century ago remain germane to that par-

ticular subject. I therefore thought it well not to introduce any considerations arising from the prodigious change in the nature of arms with which our modern generation is now too tragically familiar. I thought it better, and I hope the reader will agree with me, to leave as they stood the conclusions and the pictures I had drawn.

I may add that a third thing has happened which again "dates" this writing of eleven years ago. The centralized, highly national Russian monarchy, which was then taken for granted as an unchanging factor in European affairs, has disappeared. That revolution gives an odd antiquity—after so short a space of time!—even to so brief an historical survey as this; but I have thought it well to let that oddity stand. I have pictured the adventure which ruined Napoleon as it stood in the minds of all eleven years ago, nor is that picture falsified by its old-fashionedness.

H. Belloc.

King's Land,
Shipley,
Horsham.

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I

IT was already broad daylight upon the 29th of May, 1812, but the sun not risen, when Napoleon drove out from the courtyard of the Palace at Dresden, and, upon passing the limits of the town, took the road that runs to the north and east. His way lay straight towards the dawn. The great escort which accompanied him faced the sun as it rose an hour later over the forest.

That clattering of horses' hoofs and of wheels in the cool daybreak was the first action in the catastrophe of his creative mission and personal fate. He and the horsemen with him were setting out for the Niemen. Their departure and the moment of it were a signal that the advance upon Russia had begun.

In the evening, before he had slept, the Emperor had seen Narbonne. In the midst of all that soldiery, much of it rough from the fields and very

careless of tradition, one of those men who recalled the lost world of the eighteenth-century Courts had come posting in through the heat and dust of the dry day. It was Narbonne. He had come from Vilna, bearing the final refusal of Alexander to accept Napoleon's terms.

Narbonne's message was the end. His personality lent it the greater weight. He had been well and skillfully chosen to make the last efforts for peace. He was of that lineage and habit which suited those who received him at the Russian Court. He recalled to the only Court which had not yet heard the Revolutionary scabbards trailed across its floors the charm and, one might say, the mediocrity of the days before '93. He had talked to them not only of his mission, but of the table. He had praised their fruits. His language and his meanings were theirs. But he had not persuaded. He had brought back a simple and a final answer. "Alexander" (he could report), "neither defiant nor depressed, is not to be shaken in the resolution he has made. He said to me: 'I know that I am no such captain as is the Emperor Napoleon, and that I have no general to match against him. I know it, and that alone should convince you that I desire to avoid war. But peace will not be signed upon my soil.' "

There lay behind that noble message a prescience. The Czar conceived (and fate supported him) that no general of human genius could overthrow the mighty simplicity of the people he ruled.

Thus it was that the issue was determined, and that Napoleon, after the brief night was over, drove out from Dresden to unloose the war.

This definite act, this driving out from Dresden and inception of the war, though coming in regular course after long completed preparation and a decision already well taken, has yet about it something of doom, and of a solemn change in things.

Read the story of 1810 and 1811. For twenty months the shock had been preparing, you may say. Men watching the time could foresee the collision between the European state Napoleon had re-erected, informed throughout with the Revolution of which he was the Soldier, and the great untouched, perhaps intangible, mass of Russia beyond. We, reading those years with a knowledge of what was to succeed them, feel far more strongly the fate that was in them, and observe in the joining of that battle the process of something inevitable.

For all that partisans on either side have said;

in all the confusion of interested witnesses, of enthusiasm and of misunderstandings; through all the blur of stupidity and partial statement which a thousand subsequent histories have raised to the despair of historical science, there stands out, dominating all the weeks of anxiety and preparation, a single thing which is to the million details of the time what a mountain is to a landscape: and that is, the halt which something more than the will of men had imposed as a preliminary to the turning of the great revolutionary tide.

There is a sort of hesitation hanging over either party to the coming struggle and an indecision, coupled with a postponement of definite action, which you feel not only in the verbal conflict between the two chief partners opposed, but in every side-issue of the complex. You feel it at every turn. You feel it in the dubious grasp on Spain, now tightened, now relaxed, and the changing glances which the Emperor casts upon the too numerous raw levies, the too few veterans there caught as in the swarm of an overturned hive. You feel it in the cautious written message which Wellesley had sent to Alexander, which Alexander had answered in words only—as though to decide actively against his great opponent were more than the Czar could bear.

Through all that spring the vast contingents had been pouring up from the south and from the west, to rendezvous at last upon the Baltic plain, and though the heads of their columns still advanced towards the Polish levels and the border where true Russia could be struck, yet in all that concentration of over half a million men, you have, as you read, no certainty that they will come to battle at last.

In Paris, when, during April, Napoleon had paced his room in the Tuileries, now abrupt, now silent, watching the face of Alexander's envoy, it was not mere intrigue nor the foolish game which lesser men have supposed, but an inner restraint (which was not rational doubt upon the issue, but something deeper in the mind, a warning) that delayed him.

When at last the Emperor had determined, with the coming of May, to summon his splendid Court in the Germanies, to appear at last in the midst of those subject kings as the maker of a new Europe, and by a physical presence to threaten a final advance into the last limits of the European world, no man could have told you (and certainly not that Soldier himself) whether before the end of the summer the shock would be really joined: whether the experiment of a match with Russia which

might prove the last of his triumphs or the first of his defeats, would be attempted or no.

Such a doubt still hung over the fate of Napoleon; such an hesitation still checked the Government of that great people whom alone of the Continental world the Revolution had not touched, nor its armies invigorated, threatened, reformed, or wounded—the Russians.

Russia corporate would certainly oppose to all threats and to all blows a permanent body of resistance: such a resistance as the West did not yet comprehend. But the man in whose hand lay the immediate destiny of those millions and the issue whether they should or not, in name, and in legal theory at least, accept the universal change of Europe, that man, Alexander, in his own different fashion, felt the same great hand restraining him which had restrained the will of Bonaparte.

As the Emperor had experienced something far more profound than doubt and had stood during those anxious weeks in the presence of an inner silence, so the Czar did not halt undetermined on account of anything so small, or, for that matter, so clear as dread.

A mysticism, strange, but not ludicrous, which inspired Alexander, made him the more open to influences such as that which, as with two strong

hands, was holding back—till one fateful moment —the West from the East.

But that moment had now come. The strange restriction laid for so long upon so many masterful wills—even Napoleon's—was loosened. The last of those Gallic eastward charges which have diversified history for two thousand years was to be delivered—and to be broken. It was determined that Napoleon should fall. With the rattle and the clatter of his passage under that May dawn through the gates of Dresden, and the salute of the Guard at the bridge, the last act of the Revolutionary story had begun. The grouped carpets of men which already chequered the plains to the east, the miles upon miles of wagon trains that munitioned that half-million with sustenance and with arms, were to be used. And though the Emperor would allow four weeks more to pass before his crossing of the frontier should open the adventure (for he considered the growth of the grass on the plains, and forage for such a herd of horses as had not been seen since Attila), yet it was in this departure of his from Dresden that Napoleon threw the dice and challenged the decision already taken in heaven that the Revolution had reached its term, had accomplished its task, and that the high tide of its armies must now recede.

II

TO understand this opening war, what plan of attack was in Napoleon's mind, and what defense Russia had reserved against it, it is necessary at this moment, a month before the first shot was fired, to see the whole thing before one; to know the frontiers of the time, to grasp what obstacles impeded, what roads and towns permitted the advance.

The sketch map opposite illustrates in its main features of river and plain the theater of the invasion and the retreat, and the reader should especially note upon it the presence and the boundaries of *Poland*. This nation it is whose position and whose opportunities of liberation dominate all the beginnings of the campaign. The French had already made Poland nearly free. Her people hoped at the issue of this war to re-emerge a great and independent nation.

It will be apparent from this sketch how the first days of the invasion were favored by a Polish population in sympathy with the French armies. And it will be further apparent from the line of

the modern frontier what disasters fell upon the Polish nation consequent upon the defeat of Napoleon.

The chief feature of the ground over which the campaign of 1812 was to be fought was the unbroken level of the whole.

Northward of that half-circle of mountains whose general name is the Carpathians, but which joins on also to the boundary walls of Bohemia, lies a vast plain spreading unchecked to the flats of the Baltic in the north. This plain is on the west the ground of Poland. Opening out infinitely to the eastward it makes Russia; and the characteristic of it everywhere is a soil, now more, now less, friable with sand. It is in general of a loam which has a sandy mixture in it, sometimes so slight that it will nourish nothing but a barren heath; sometimes so weighted with clay that the whole countryside is one huge marsh. The vast flats are studded here and there at intervals everywhere with woods of pine, of birch, and of beech, singularly even in height, singularly regular in outline, and adding as it were to the immensity of the monotonous spaces by furnishing a scale upon which the eye can measure them.

Sometimes between groups of three or four such woods, set in a line, the eye seems to look

down some endless avenue. Again, as one travels, one great united forest will stretch across the whole horizon, making a tiny dark line between the pale yellow of the summer earth and the blue of the sky. And again, as one travels, one will pass for a whole day and then another through such woodland, not very luxuriant, not very tall; the cutting by which one's track goes eastward piercing the forest like a strict canal.

These plains are everywhere intersected by water-courses—for the most part slow. The larger ones are always broad and often deep, the lesser ones most numerous. In no direction can one proceed without finding such streams, either an obstacle athwart one's way, or a means of travel in the direction one intended. It was water-carriage by this system of rivers which made possible from the beginning the presence of a great population, the interchange of trade, the communication of ideas and the establishment of civilization on these wide floors of Eastern Europe. It is their course which provides an advance, their crossing which presents an obstacle for armies.

One further element must be appreciated if we are to understand how a campaign is conducted in such a place. These plains are not

always uniform. For fifty, sixty, a hundred miles, you will find them like a calm sea, dead level. It is in such dead levels that you will perceive upon the horizon the glint of marsh land. But in another hundred miles or so the flat will be sufficiently disturbed to give diversity. There are never true hills, but the land will roll a little. To come after many days of the mere level upon an easy swell, though its crest be but one hundred feet higher than its trough, or to come upon a shallow but abrupt ravine with a trestle bridge thrown across it, has upon the eye an effect much greater than could be believed by those who live in scenery of the sort we know in the West.

I look back as I write this upon the moment when I first saw Moscow. I came upon the town (as did Napoleon's army) over a height of this kind, and saw the whole place lying below me in a sort of great basin. I do not know by how much the slight swell upon which I stood surmounts the hollow below. At any rate, it must be so little that it would be lost altogether in any of the countrysides we know in France or England, Spain, Italy, or the Rhine. But after days of travel over the great plains, this and many another such an insignificant rise powerfully affects the mind, and whereas Moscow would, were it in the West, be

remembered only as lying in an open plain, the traveler who has come to it by road after those leagues and leagues of Eastern Europe, thinks of it almost as though it lay in a circle of hills.

Next it must be observed that commonly, though not invariably, the rivers have cut in this soft soil something of a trench. Even the smaller streams produce here and there those shallow but abrupt ravines of which I have spoken, usually wooded upon their sides, admirable cover; and the banks of the larger streams overhang the water in heights often considerable. Sometimes it is one bank, sometimes the other (rarely both), which thus stands well above the stream. The town of Warsaw, for instance, lies up above the left bank of the Vistula, upon a plateau as distinct as that which supports Omaha; and, indeed, the courses and landscapes of these rivers strongly remind one of the central American plain, save that the much longer presence of civilization has tamed them more. Warsaw stands, then, upon a bluff well above the stream, and the ways down from the main part of the town to the Vistula are steep. But the right bank is flat and level with the water. At Smolensk, to take another example, you have the town built upon the flat left bank of the

Dnieper, and the high bluff of bank upon the right shore beyond.

So much for the physical character of these interminable lands.

It might be imagined that an external aspect so uniform, and material conditions so homogeneous, would have affected man sufficiently to have covered all that similar surface with one race and one manner of living; but man escapes from these things, and the accidents that mold his history include much more than his material environment.

It is true that, as a whole, a race of marked characteristics called the Slavs, with dialects, and even literary languages, closely allied one to the other (and generally called "Slavonic") is the inhabitant of all these plains. But within that general unity, and cutting sharply across it, you have a frontier most momentous to European history. To the west of that frontier lies an inland culture reaching from the mountains right to the Baltic Sea, holding all the western portion of the plains, pressing closely upon the Germans to the west, and coming to within five days' march of Berlin. This culture is that of the Poles; and Poland (though a little vague in its definition to the east where populations formerly subject merge the Polish with the Russian march) is yet—after the vividly individ-

ual Western nations, such as Ireland, France, England—the most highly differentiated nation in Europe. Between this Polish culture on the west, Slav indeed in race and Slavonic in language, and Russia—also Slavonic—to the east, there is a profound spiritual gulf, which gulf is dug by religion. Catholic Poland by all her inheritance and tradition leans on Western Europe. Orthodox Russia derives from Byzantium and from the Bosphorous. The boundary between these two religions, with their respective cultures, marks the chief contrast and cleavage in Europe.

The invasion of Russia meant therefore in 1812 (and would mean to-day) not the passage of some nominal political frontier, but the crossing of a real division—a belt rather than a line—which separates the Polish from the Russian peoples, and the Catholic from the Orthodox religion.

In the whole matter of this campaign of 1812, it must particularly be remembered that Napoleon had restored to a legal status the Polish nation. A generation before the French Revolution, their country had been invaded and divided through the infamy of Frederick of Prussia between his own, the Russian, and the Austrian Crowns. This crime (from which so much of our own near future

is to develop)[1] was consummated in the heat of the French Revolution itself.

Napoleon had largely reversed the outrage. He had not wholly restored the ancient frontiers of Poland. Such towns as Vilna to the north, Minsk to the south, Polish in memory and for the most part in civil habit, were still left subject to the Czar. The River Niemen to the north, to the south the River Bug, bounded Russia upon the west in 1812. But the core of historical Poland was reconstituted under the title of the "Grand Duchy of Warsaw," and, among the great issues of the campaign, there was to have been determined, as I have said, the final reconstruction of Poland.

Having in view those landscapes, those frontiers, and those political divisions, we can next apprehend the dispositions of Napoleon and of his enemy at this end of May when war was certainly determined, and we can perceive the nature of the plan which the Emperor had laid.

Through the heart of Poland and forming, as it were, the nucleus of that nation, watering its three typical towns (Cracow, the sacred and ancient city of Coronation; Warsaw, the newer capital; Thorn, the fortress) runs the River Vistula. In

[1] Written in 1912.

this May of 1812 the Grand Army, numbering certainly over 400,000 effectives, and upon paper nearly 50,000 more, lay in nine groups of armed men. Let us carefully retain the names of the general commanding each group: its composition, and the number by which it was called, and which formed its title. For each of these groups was an *Army Corps:* one of those self-contained units which Napoleon had organized to such perfection in the pursuit of his conquering mission.

They were of very different strength, some large, some small; they were recruited from different peoples. We must follow them through this campaign if we are to comprehend its fortunes.

Upon the extreme north round *Königsberg,* with *M'Donald* in command, you have what was called the *Xth Corps.* It numbered over 30,000 men. It was, for the most part, composed of Germans, and included the small proportion of his Prussian allies whom Napoleon had summoned for the war. Let this Xth Corps, under M'Donald, be regarded as something separate from all the rest, for its orders were and remained confined to particular and local action in the north, and were not directly connected with the great advance.

Next in order, upon the course of the river itself, you find the Ist, the IInd, and the IIIrd

Army Corps; the Ist with Elbing for its headquarters; the IInd with Marienberg and Marienwerda; the IIIrd with the fortress of Thorn. At the head of the Ist Corps was Davout; at the head of the IInd Oudinot; at the head of the IIIrd the famous Ney.

These three main corps between them numbered close upon 150,000 men. With the exception of a few Swiss in the IInd and of certain Würtembergers in the IIIrd, these, the backbone of all the army, were French; and nearly half of the whole were in the Ist Corps under Davout.

We must carry, at any rate for this first part of the campaign, this body of nearly 150,000 men, these three *corps d'armée,* the Ist, the IInd, and the IIIrd, in one bracket together. They crossed the frontier together: together they formed what I shall call the spearhead of the stroke.

The next group, which we find concentrated higher up the river, consists of the IVth Army Corps and the VIth. The first of these, the IVth Corps, commanded by Prince Eugéne, was a large body of 45,000 men. It was Italian for the most part, and the deeds of the Italians in this campaign, ill recorded as they are, were always heroic, sometimes decisive. It was of the Italians that Napoleon might have made (were there such things in

history as complete successes) a second pillar, with the French, to support his reconstruction of a united Europe.

The VIth Corps, under St. Cyr, was far smaller, 25,000, and was mainly German in composition, consisting of Bavarians. These two corps, the IVth and the VIth, together numbered some 70,000 men, and lay round Plock; and with them, the second half of the northern group upon the Vistula, we come to a dividing line in the arrangement. For below, upon the upper river, three army corps were united under a separate command, that of Napoleon's incompetent brother Jerome. These three corps were the Vth, the VIIIth, and the VIIth. They numbered altogether very little over 70,000 men. Of these rather more than half were in the Vth Corps, under Poniatowski, the Polish patriot, and their recruitment was Polish. These 35,000 or 36,000 men were Poles, ardent in war, marching against an hereditary enemy, awaiting the full re-establishment of their country. They were the best of all the auxiliary troops of Napoleon, perhaps even superior to the Italians. The remaining half of the Upper Vistula command, the VIIIth and the VIIth Army Corps, were of different and less valuable composition. The VIIth, under Reynier, were Saxons, the

VIIIth, under Vandamme, were Hessians and Westphalians. The two together did not equal in number the Poles.

The Vth Army Corps, the Poles under Poniatowski, had Warsaw for their headquarters; the VIIIth Army Corps, the Saxons, under Reynier, that much smaller body, lay round Gora Kalvaria; and the Hessians and Westphalians, the VIIIth Corps, under Vandamme, were at the limit of these river positions with New Alexandria ("Novo Alexandria") for their headquarters.

Such, then, was the composition of the main line of troops which lay prepared for advance in a huge crescent all along the Vistula, from its mouth to its upper reaches; and, to sum up, we divide the troops so stationed into three groups: the detached body, under M'Donald at Königsberg, the Xth Corps (A); the massed bulk of army corps, Ist, IInd, and IIIrd, upon the Lower Vistula (B); with about half as much again of their number loosely attached to them a little higher up the river, the army corps, IVth and VIth, (BB). These, down to the VIth, form the northern group.

Next, in a separate southern group, we have the Vth, VIIIth, and VIIth Army Corps, forming altogether but 70,000 men, and under the com-

mand of Napoleon's brother Jerome, none of them French, and destined, as we shall see, to play a separate rôle in the first part of the war subsidiary to that of the great northern commands.

I have, upon the sketch map overleaf, attempted to indicate the positions and strength of these various bodies as they lay along the course of the Vistula at the end of May, 1812. It will, of course, be understood that the actual space occupied by each army corps was far smaller than appears upon the map, the quarters of each being in the close neighborhood of the various towns to which they were allotted. But this exaggeration is necessary if we are to give a conventional impression of the comparative size of the various bodies. It will here be seen how much larger the Ist Army Corps was than any of the others, and also how the Ist, IInd, and IIIrd between them formed a mass little short of half the total of all the army corps combined. I have upon this map expressed in round figures, measured by average marching days, the direction and distance of the three possible objectives, upon any one of which Napoleon might decide to advance: St. Petersburg, Moscow, or Kiev. I have further indicated on the same scale of strength and with the same

indication of position, the two Russian armies opposing Napoleon at that moment; but I will turn more particularly to these a few pages hence.

It will be seen that we have here accounted for not more than just over 330,000 men. There is a large balance to be made up before we reach the minimum of 400,000, or the maximum (on paper) of nearly 450,000.

This balance was made up of three separate bodies. There was, in the first place, a cavalry reserve under Murat, 40,000 men nominally, perhaps somewhat less—for there was difficulty in obtaining remounts. There was, separate from every other corps, the two bodies of Guards, Young and Old, with their cavalry, set down at 47,000. Finally, right away down beyond the Austrian frontier at Lemberg, an auxiliary body of doubtful loyalty under the Austrian General Schwarzenberg (on the map S) numbered 30,000 more.

If we look at the map we see that Napoleon's great line thus lay like a half-moon rather over 200 miles in length, or over a fortnight's marching from one tip to the other, and the whole so disposed towards the Russian frontier that no one could tell whether he was going to strike upon a northern or a southern section of that frontier.

His "spearpoint"—the great bulk of his best troops, that is, the Ist, IInd, and IIIrd Corps (B) and their supporters the IVth and VIth Corps (BB)—could march with equal rapidity upon Kovno or Grodno. Nor was it at all impossible for him to make a surprise advance southward into the district called Volhynia, with Kiev as his objective, supposing him to march the whole army in line in that direction. But this latter adventure was not very likely. It would lead to neither capital, St. Petersburg or Moscow, and for the bulk of his army it necessitated lengthy marching. The blow was more likely to be delivered somewhere upon the Niemen, but where exactly it was still impossible for the Russians upon the defense to tell.

Now let us turn to the conditions of that defense. I have indicated its position at the end of May, 1812, in the map (B) opposite page 21. Let us see why it occupied that position.

The mere outline of the map without indications of soil might make one think that the Russian forces, such as they were, would have before them no more than the simple though difficult task of watching the whole of the menaced line from the neighborhood of Lutsk (on the road to Kiev) to the point north of Kovno, Rossieny, which lay opposite M'Donald's corps at Königsberg. Such

a line of about 300 miles might apparently be attacked at any point Napoleon chose; the vastness of Russia, opening out funnel-wise from the Polish frontier, would give the defenders a somewhat wider arc to watch than the attackers had an arc whence to proceed. The task of the Russians would therefore be arduous, but also quite simple, supposing that communications were everywhere facile along that great stretch of country.

But communications were far from facile in western Russia in 1812. Roads were, for the most part, little more than primitive tracks; the towns, as depots of supply and of information and a harboring for troops, were well found, but very few; few also were existing bridges over rivers. But chief as an obstacle in communication was something unique in Europe: the great marshes of the Pripet.

Now of the roads, such as they were, and of towns upon them you had a northern group connected both with the course of the Niemen and with the course of the Dwina; both groups of roads and towns joined in one region, comprising *Kovno* and *Grodno*. This region formed, therefore, the entry into Russia whether Napoleon proposed to advance upon St. Petersburg or upon Moscow. Upon the Niemen itself, you have behind Kovno the town of Vilna, and next, on the road

to Moscow, the towns of Vitebsk and Smolensk. You have again, behind Kovno, but upon the Dwina, the town called by the Germans Dunaburg, but by the Russians Dvinsk. It was certain that an army invading through this northern section would pass through Kovno or through Grodno, and, if it were attempting to reach St. Petersburg, pass through Dvinsk; if it were attempting to reach Moscow, it would pass through, or in the neighborhood of, Vitebsk.

Why do I thus segregate the northern group and make it something quite apart from any southern line of invasion? *Because it so happens that all the upper waters of the River Pripet are one vast countryside of marsh.* It is the most extraordinary sight in the world, and one the difficulties of viewing which are so considerable that no one to my knowledge has thoroughly described that amazing district, at least in the English tongue.

Endless forests and almost equally endless meres occupy the whole land, from a little south of the line of Slonim, right away one horizon after another, day after day, throughout all the upper waters that form the Pripet basin. The town of Pinsk, situated in the midst of this region, has

given a name to it, and by the term the "Marshes of Pinsk" is this district best known.

Now that obstacle must determine the strategy of any invasion of Russia from the west. Even under modern conditions, you may note the fashion in which railway construction is compelled to avoid that huge quadrilateral of impassable land. One line only runs through it, to serve Pinsk and to link up Poland with the lower valley of the Pripet. But under all conditions, whether before or after the age of railways, whether modern or ancient, the difficulties of the Upper Pripet valley with its marshes dominate the strategics of an advance upon Russia from Central Europe. So did that obstacle dominate the considerations both of Napoleon's attack and of the Russian defense.

In other words, it was at once impossible and unnecessary for the Russians to watch their whole line. It was both possible and necessary only to watch the northern section *above* the marshes and the southern gateway upon the Kiev road *below* them. And with the object of performing such a dual task were the insufficient forces of the national defense in Russia divided. Two armies separated by this marshy land originally, that is, a month before the actual invasion, faced the long-

drawn-out line of Napoleon's troops upon the Vistula. These two armies combined did not yet amount to half Napoleon's forces. They came, all told, to not quite 200,000 men, and of these one may say that two-thirds were stretched in a

long line watching the northern section from near Lida through Vilna to the neighborhood of the Upper Niemen (I have marked them upon my sketch map facing page 21, under the letter N). They were commanded by *Barclay*. The remaining third of the men available for watching the frontier, more than 60,000 but not quite 70,000,

under the command of *Bagration,* had formed in the neighborhood of Lutsk, to the south of the marshy land and barring the Kiev road—I have marked them on the large map facing page 21 with the letter K.

To sum up: The whole strategical situation at the end of May, 1912, was this:—

Napoleon had an army of well over 400,000 men stretched in a crescent along the line of the Vistula.

It would not be apparent, until the first of the Emperor's various bodies were put in movement, upon which portion of the Russian frontier he intended to deliver his main attack. He might, though it was unlikely, direct his principal move against Kiev and the south of Russia, through Lutsk; he might, what was much more probable from the disposition of his troops, march for Moscow or for St. Petersburg, striking in either case the line of the Niemen at Grodno or Kovno; but even in the latter case, there was doubt as to whether he would make rather to the north of this northern portion by Kovno, or rather to the southern side of it by Grodno.

The Russians, therefore, acting upon the defensive, were compelled to watch a sector of 300 miles along that frontier. A great mass of marsh just south of the middle of their frontier had the

advantage of saving them the necessity of watching a great portion (for no one could invade by that marsh); on the other hand, it had the disadvantage of separating such of their forces as might lie south of the marsh from such as might lie to the north of it.

The total Russian force immediately available at the theater of operations was, at this moment, about half Napoleon's, or, say, somewhat less than 200,000 men.[1] Of this body some two-thirds were guarding against the principal danger by watching in an extended line the frontier of the Niemen; the remaining third beyond the marsh was watching the southern road of advance into their country towards Kiev, through Lutsk.

Thus things stood in the moment of expectancy before the first blow should be delivered.

Where that first blow was to fall was apparent in the first days of June. The order to advance

[1] My object in this short book is to give as simple and comprehensive a picture as possible of the war. I have not, therefore, discussed the various arguments in favor of those widely different estimates of the Russian strength which various authors put forward. I accept what I believe to be the best analysis—that of the eminent German military authority, Yorck von Wartenburg. But I may add that I do not merely accept his authority: the figures he gives seem to me to be based upon the best documentary judgment of the situation at the frontier when the war began.

was given. It was given to the northern section of Napoleon's line. It was directed towards the Niemen, and while the French left thus swung forward from the Lower Vistula, their right upon the Upper Vistula was halted.

To meet this now declared intention of the enemy, the Russians moved Bargration north of the marshes until he stood, with considerably less than his original command—probably not quite 50,000 men—round the point of Volkovisk. Such of his corps as had remained in the old position south of the marshes formed a nucleus of new lives which were rapidly being mobilized and which ultimately rose in the neighborhood of Lutsk to somewhat over 40,000.

With the precision due to a vast preparation and to an indefatigable grip upon details, Napoleon's movement proceeded. As it developed, the mechanism of advance he had designed was apparent.

The whole army might be said to be swinging eastward round a pivot on the Upper Vistula. M'Donald with his isolated force, the Xth Corps, stood, after a short advance, by Tilsit; the Ist, the IInd, and the IIIrd Army Corps, Davout, Oudinot, and Ney, converged directly eastward until after the middle of the month they stood (with the

Guards and the cavalry reserve) shoulder to shoulder in cantonments opposite Kovno; the IVth and VIth Corps, immediately up river above them, were marched to positions south of those taken up by the Ist, IInd, and IIIrd, and a trifle in their rear. Next, the three corps upon the Upper Vistula were moved forward: the northernmost, the Vth, rather more than halfway to the Russian frontier; the next, the VIIIth, somewhat less; and the last, the VIIth, but a very little way beyond the Vistula.

In that last week of June, therefore, the movements the army had completed brought it into a new line, which I have indicated upon the map opposite. The objects to be achieved by these new dispositions were clear enough. The isolated corps X under M'Donald up north was to protect the flank of the great advance. The three main army corps (Ist, IInd, and IIIrd) with the Guards and the reserve cavalry thus massed in front of Kovno, were to strike in between Barclay and Bagration, to divide those Russian armies one from the other and to keep them separate. The five corps, which lay farther and farther back from the frontier (until the last one was hardly advanced at all), had for their object the "holding" of Bagra-

tion until the main advance should thus have cut him off from his colleague.

This plan (ultimately decisive of the whole campaign, because throughout all the formative early part of that campaign Napoleon's initiative decided the enemy's movements) merits a close attention: had it been carried out as Napoleon intended it would have laid the foundation of victory. It failed through the incompetence of his subordinate and brother, to whom he should never have given this command: whom he did not order with sufficient promptitude and energy. From this initial failure flowed the ultimate failure of the campaign.

To advance one wing of any force less than the other (or not at all) is technically called "refusing" that wing. Again, when we set over against some particular portion of our enemy's troops a portion of our own strong enough to engage his attention, to make him fear pursuit if he retreats, and to make him anxious as to which line those troops opposite him may take, we are said to "hold" him—or, rather, we are attempting to "hold" him.

It was, as I have said, the function of the corps upon the Upper Vistula (Vth, VIIIth, VIIth), the army under the command of Napoleon's brother

Jerome, thus to "hold" Bagration until the main body striking through from Kovno to Vilna could get down upon his flank and cut him off.

In war, whichever of two enemies, even unequally matched, fully knows the plans of the other, while that other is ignorant of *his* plans, can either achieve success or, if his inferiority is too marked for that, at least stave off disaster. An unexpected disposition, unguessed by the opponent, is the obvious essential of surprise. The reader, therefore, looking at the map, with the simple arrangement of the opposing forces equally evident before his eyes, may wonder in what the value of Napoleon's plan consisted.

"Why," he will say, "could not Bagration at once effect his junction with Barclay, who was close at hand, and prevent the irruption of half the French army between himself and his colleague: preventing at the same time his own isolation and destruction by what would become overwhelming forces in front and upon one side of him?"

The answer to this lies in the same phrase as that which answered a previous question: "Why should Bagration and Barclay have been separated at all?"

They were separated, as we have seen, because

Napoleon's superior forces did not manifestly threaten only one point upon the frontier, but several points. So long as that threat remained, the Russian armies would occupy their separate fields. But, it may be said, Bagration, when the attack struck at Kovno, would of course know at last where the blow was falling, and would immediately attempt to rejoin Barclay lest he should be cut off; would he not?

No, because Bagration had not before him, as the reader has, a simple sketch of his enemy's operations. He would know, indeed, that a great force was attacking Kovno and threatening the gap between himself and Barclay, but he would also know that other very large masses (the army under Jerome) lay just in front of *him* to the east; and he would be more accurately aware of their strength and menace than he could be of the strength and menace of those before Kovno. Did he immediately retreat from before Jerome, and make at once for a junction with Barclay to the north, he was inviting the whole of a vastly superior force to fall upon both armies combined. To do that would have been madness.

Of the courses open to Bagration the first most immediate and most obvious was to stand pat until he could determine whither these southern portions

of Napoleon's army, Jerome's command, were directed. Now, that Bagration should so stand pat was Napoleon's whole object. Against Bagration, as he so stood, Napoleon intended to launch his brother's army, frontwards; while down from the north, upon Bagration's right flank, would come the troops—or some portion of them—that had already crossed at Kovno.

What we are about to follow is the failure of this very first stage of Napoleon's plan.

Jerome failed to press that frontal attack as it should have been pressed. When he did move, his movement was so slow that it failed to synchronize with the other corresponding movement of troops from the north down upon Bagration's right flank, and Bagration, in the event, escaped.

With these mechanics of the opening campaign established, we may turn again to the story of it; and that story opens with the crossing of the Niemen at Kovno by Napoleon's main body, and the first invasion of Russian soil.

It was Sunday, the 21st of June, 1812. Of Napoleon's host three army corps and the Guard —more than 200,000, with their guns—lay immediately south of that broad river of the plains, the River Niemen, in the woods and villages of the

left bank, upon the higher land which falls in a steepish edge to the flats that border the river. The stream before them was that frontier which, at his word, they were to cross and so let loose the war.

They were all ordered and ready, save that the last units of some were still marching in. Behind to the east and to the south, in that order which we have surveyed, the huge crescent of other bodies was gathering to follow, until at last much more than half a million men should have passed the boundary of Russia in the advance of the Grand Army. But these first here on the Niemen, in the full northern solstice when there is hardly any night, were the spearhead, and it was what they were about to do which opened the campaign.

They were still upon that Sunday within the territories of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, the reconstituted country of free Poland; they were within a mile or two of invasion, but they had not yet invaded. The day, though cloudless, was heavy with some unnatural heat, and the summer was silent along the plains and above the broad belt of water as Napoleon's carriage dusted in.

The date was not of good augury. It was that midsummer's day which had ruined at Varennes

the last monarch of the French. Napoleon when he had slept rose very early, even before sunrise, the earliest sunrise of the year. He was in the saddle by two. He rode towards the banks of the river, and as he reached them his horse stumbled, and either he or some one by said muttering, "A Roman would have gone back."

A little later, when he had asked where the outposts lay, and had learned that they were formed of his Polish troops (the 6th Lancers), a major of the regiment from which they had been drafted came towards him, accompanied by other officers—Suchorzewsky was his name. The Emperor questioned him a little, and then made this strange request—that the Polish officers should change uniforms with him and his suite. It was a bivouac post in which these dozen men, one of them very great, stood in their shirts under that Monday morning sun (for it had now risen). The Emperor chose a Colonel Pagowski's tunic, and Berthier, the organizer of all Napoleon's army, was soon dressed the same. It is to be believed that those who had thus sacrificed their uniform put on the French instead, and that the colonel himself was disguised for a brief time in Napoleon's uniform of the Guard. Two horses were brought; Napoleon and Berthier mounted them. A Polish

lieutenant, Zrelski, went with them, for the outposts that day were of his troop. They rode for three miles northward until they came to the village called Alexota which lies upon the left bank of the river over against Kovno, and there, from a doctor's house, the windows of which commanded all the river, Napoleon, in this chance Polish uniform of his, mastered the lay of the stream and its approaches and its best passage.

In all this business of the Monday morning he had been careful not only not to show a French uniform, but, if possible, to secrete his personal movements, though he was accompanied by no more than a handful of men. The horses had been hidden. No one had seen them from the Russian side. Even to its details he desired all this to be a surprise.

When he had thus grasped the great river and its tributary the Vilia, where it comes in, making a further defense for Kovno, and the bend or reach down southward (where the railway crosses now), the Emperor rode back to the bivouac a little changed. He seemed lighter in mind and gayer. They brought him meat and wine. He ate and drank by the roadside, and after the meal he said: "We must give back what is not ours," and changed clothes again. He would not ride farther. He

got into his carriage, with Berthier by his side. He drove up river to this point and to that of the bank, and he chose, round the big bend, out of sight of Kovno and to the south of that frontier town, the village called Poniemon for the passage of his troops.

It was late in the afternoon. He gave these orders: That upon the next day, Tuesday, after sunset, the engineers should go forward with their pontoons and throw three bridges across the Niemen side by side. These orders given, a fatigue (which came upon him now in his middle age too often) struck him and he must repose. But he could not sleep. He sat or lay motionless in the great heat, now in his tent, now in a house near by: but he got no rest.

By Tuesday, 23rd June, the corps were all marshaled and ready. The last contingents had come in, the train was loaded, and after sunset, under a young moon, Morand came forward with the sappers, and, as the midsummer twilight gathered, fixed the points (some three hundred yards apart) whence the pontoon bridges should be thrown to the right bank. Then with some 400 men he crossed in boats to that right bank over the broad, white stream silent in the glimmer. Morand was the first to touch the enemy's earth

in that fatal year. He found there a troop of Russian horse watching in the night. The officer commanding that troop formally challenged the invaders; then withdrew, firing a few shots as he went.

The work of the engineers was accomplished with an intense rapidity; by eleven that night the Ist Army Corps had begun their crossing, and from this hour right on for two hours more the confused broken step of its march across the pontoons sounded hollow above the gurgle of the water against the prows of the boats.

There is a light in the North under the fifty-fifth parallel all night long on these the short nights of the year, and against that light a man might have seen the sloping muskets and bayonets of all that infantry passing in three ceaseless streams across the two hundred yards of gleaming river in the dark. There were no other sounds, no loud cries of command, and, since the enemy had abandoned the farther shore, no shots in the gloom; only hour after hour the echo of the thousand after thousand of footsteps rumbling and reverberating close to the water level and the ceaseless passing of the men: then the wheels of the guns and the train, making a more thunderous noise, though subdued.

By half-past one in the morning this Ist Corps, Davout's men, were across, and, as the light broadened, Oudinot with the IInd Corps followed; then the Guard, taller than the rest in their high bearskins, and marching heavier, so that the pontoons sounded more. The sun rose up river towards Omolia, over the flats of the bend, and after it had risen, the IIIrd Corps under Ney began the crossing. So it went on into the morning.

The Emperor was early among those who first passed over on to Russia soil, and he stood there whistling or humming the familiar tune of "Malbrook," and saying, within hearing of many, that all this passage of so great and majestic a force was not worth one song sung by a girl in Paris.

The head of the troops was in Kovno by the forenoon of that Wednesday, and held it; but all that day and the next the mass of the invasion poured across the three bridges, to which a fourth before Kovno itself was now added. By the Thursday evening, the center of the Grand Army had wholly occupied the Russian bank, and the tragedy had begun.

There was no one to resist them. The light cavalry of the enemy, which had stayed but to watch and report, had hurried away. The necessities of the thing and its final doom were months

in the future for those men, as our necessary dooms are in our futures hidden away from us.

It was in this way that the French crossed the Niemen, in the small hours of Wednesday, June 24, 1812. All that day long and all the morrow as well their thousands continued to pass.

III

IT was Monday, the 29th of June, 1812. The headquarters had reached Vilna.

The stifling heat in which the four days' march from Kovno and the Niemen had been accomplished had now bred thunder. The air was heavier. The Polish city suffered from that oppression and silence which precedes a storm, while through its rain-threatened streets and under low, dark clouds the furniture and trappings of a great feast were being carried in wagons to the chief of the city's great houses. There was to be a ball that night.

Long before the guests had come the clouds broke, and to a first furious discharge of the sky a new weather succeeded. It grew strangely cold, and the rain, which now continuously fell and was to fall day after day over the low woods and empty plains of Lithuania, was assiduous and almost wintry.

When the festival came, that weather—which fought against the Grand Army, even in its first marches, and seemed to be the enemy's new ally

—was forgotten. The brilliance of the night, all that crowd of color and of metal under the candles, and all that music, removed from the mind for the moment the great business of war, in the midst of which it stood like an island.

There was a halt in the movement of those rooms and a silence imposed upon their music. The Emperor had come.

Many men have left their record of the hour that followed. Observers who remembered the eighteenth century and the Courts, men of the nobility, to whom this mere camp and soldiers' dance seem half grotesque; soldiers for whom the man was a god; other soldiers, more French, who were concerned with reality alone and who set down the impression of the short, stout figure, the anxious and set face, its power undiminished, yet some fatigue of the soul apparent in it, and the rapid characteristic step up the broad staircase of that house, as to an assault. The confusion of courtiership and applause is recorded, and the mild astonishment of the Germans.

This Chief of that half-million which lay spread all around for the subjugation of Russia was present at the feast for only just such time as permitted him to seek out or, rather, send for one man after another, and to exchange a brief sen-

tence, commonly a question; the replies, when they moved him to anything further, moved him to what, in spite of his low voice and slow movements through the throng, were commands. Then, long before sunrise, the Emperor left—and was the first to leave.

The light of the early morning filled the great rooms. Its odd contrast of reality against the splendor of costume, and scene, and ornament struck hard; like the contrast between such grandeur and the stream of war in the midst of which it stood.

Under the high roof of the Palace porch one huge coach drew up after another, and the last of the guests dribbled away. The horses, as each team clattered in, were shivering with the new unnatural cold to which the season had turned, and upon the stones of the street and upon the leads of the porch pattered the ceaseless rain.

With the first hours of that same morning the Emperor in his room, refusing sleep, received the dispatches of his subordinates and dictated his own. The news he received was the beginning of what was to come in, hour after hour, during all those succeeding days of the rain. That broad earth-track (lined here and there with mile-long avenues of trees) which was called a trunk road

in this untried country of his adventure, was growing sodden and would soon be a morass.

There had been such and such breakdowns already in the main convoys. There had been such and such failures in the supply. Such and such units had passed twenty-four hours without bread.

The army of Italy, Eugène's command, two whole corps, had not yet crossed the river. The dispatch describing their positions was a long one, detailed. Its significant phrase was terse enough:

"On account of the rain, . . ."

Here at Vilna, waiting news from the south (and *why* shall be next described), the Emperor delayed.

He awaited other news than this news of the first victories of the rain: the particular news from the south. Jerome, his brother, always failing him, was silent inexplicably as to the cause of his delay. The Emperor dictated that sharp note in which he insisted that the right wing, Jerome's, the Southern Army, should press forward—the whole of his plan to prevent the junction of the two main Russian bodies depended upon Jerome's speed, and already in the imperfect dispatches from Jerome's command an uneasy hint of tardiness and of confusion appeared.

The next day and the next, as each new morn-

ing found Napoleon dictating, receiving, co-ordinating information and command, the cold rain endured, and was a proof, manifest upon the windows, of communications breaking, of men starving, and of the ruin of the train.

How many details came before his eyes! Places marshy even during a dry summer, places where great logs laid side by side carried some semblance of a track through the bog, the passage of so many men and wheels under such weather had continually broken the way and left gaps difficult to repair. All this stood out in the reports as loss of horses; less and less horses day after day; wagons abandoned with their grain; an over-driven beast unharnessed from a bogged cart to supplement an artillery team falling, killed for food; requisition yielding painfully, from ruined farms, not a tenth of the mounts and sumpters needed—and all along that four days' march the sodden line marked by the carcasses of fallen beasts. Wrote one man, reporting at the end of the disastrous week: "They have counted ten thousand horses dead by the roadside."

There was the chief of the news. Men also had begun to fall under that sharp revolution in the weather, and the lads who had barely sustained the great heat before Kovno and cursed

the marsh flies in the bare country beyond as they pushed up to Vilna were destroyed by the advent of a sudden cold and the hour after hour, day and night, and day afterwards, in bivouac, on sentry, beneath dripping tents: the rain. These were not the great paved roads of the West, where all that story had begun. There was no furniture of a heaped civilization about them, not the succor of anciently rich surroundings: they had come to eastern wildernesses that bound our Europe. They crouched at night round fires lit ill under the little trees and in the marshes of the wild.

So passed all that week, much of the next; and the rain would not cease. To one general officer's respectful message that his men lacked grain, the Emperor briefly wrote: "And my Guard have no bread, but a meat ration only."

Then from the south came certain news at last—Jerome had failed, through sloth or muddle. The Russian army, which he should have cut off, had escaped him. Napoleon detached from his own great command Davout to push down south and head off the enemy whom Jerome had failed to pass and press outwards. It was too late. Somewhere in the plains far before him the united forces of the enemy would meet.

With the fear, not yet the certitude, of this, Napoleon at last determined that his own concentration was sufficiently effected; supplies were now—for the moment at least—in touch with the three hundred thousand mouths they should feed; and he pushed on, the rain now over and the roads passable, to that "somewhere" upon the Moscow road where he might find the whole of his enemy in force, and bring him to a decision.

It was not till Friday, the 17th of July, that the Emperor himself left Vilna and took the Moscow road. He was to be drawn on farther than he knew. A month was to pass before he was to come to grips with the retreating enemy, and when he did so, it was too late. It was not until he saw the cupolas of Smolensk above the small battlements of her old brick walls that he was to see in the same view the lines of Barclay on the northern heights above the town, and hear the musket fire of Bagration's infantry in the plain before it.

IV

THIS critical phase of the campaign, the initial stumble from which the advance never recovered, must be grasped in detail if the story of the war is to have its full meaning. We must comprehend the nature of the actual movements, complicated and dispersed as these were, whereby the Grand Army failed to hold its enemy at the outset of the struggle; for if we have no clear idea of it we shall not perceive the sources of the final disaster, and the ultimate ruin of Napoleon's power. At the cost, therefore, of an interruption in this, one of the great stories of Europe, I shall at this point first present, and repeat in the simplest form, the strategical elements of Napoleon's initial effort, and next give sketch-maps to show the phases through which it passed between the first contact at Vilna and the final junction of the Russian forces before Smolensk.

Immediately before crossing the Niemen Napoleon's great host was, as we have seen, roughly divided into main groups—the one to the north in front of Kovno, the other a few days' march

to the south in front of Grodno. The one to the north was under the direct command of Napoleon, and its various leaders were in immediate dependence upon his orders; the one to the south was under the general command of Napoleon's brother Jerome.

Opposite to Napoleon's group was Barclay, commanding forces about half as numerous as the enemy's. Opposite to Jerome was Bagration, commanding forces somewhat less than half the enemy in front of him. We have seen that the Russians were compelled thus to divide their inferior forces because Napoleon, having divided his own superior forces in the fashion we have seen, the Russians could not yet be certain upon which of the three main objectives he might determine to march, those three main objectives being St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Kiev. Unwise as a division of forces always is, especially upon the defensive, the Russians had no choice but to submit to it upon this occasion, and it was part of Napoleon's plan that they should be thus compelled to separate their two main commands.

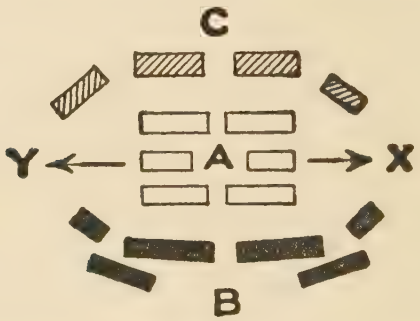
Before proceeding to show what Napoleon intended to follow as a consequence of this division, certain postulates of strategy must first be admitted.

(1) The superior force can take the initiative (other things being equal), and the inferior force must retreat before it in such a direction as the superior offensive force may determine by the nature of its own advance.

(2) So long as the inferior force is free to retreat, supposing marching power to be equal and peculiar obstacles to be absent, it can refuse indefinitely to accept battle, with all the chances of defeat which an action imposed by a superior force involves. The pursuing superior force can keep in contact with the pursued inferior force, and it can shepherd them more or less in whatever direction it chooses, but unless it forces them against some obstacle of nature, art, or other bodies of armed men, it cannot compel them to action.

(3) An inferior force surrounded by a superior one is, in the military sense of the term, annihilated. It can be compelled to lay down its arms, or it can be destroyed. The term "surrounded" does not mean that the inferior force suffering this disaster is inclosed in a complete ring; it means that it has forces both in front of it and behind it sufficiently numerous to prevent its breaking through backwards or forwards, and at the same time sufficiently numerous to detach men who shall prevent it breaking out to the left side or to the

right. It means that the enemy before and behind the "surrounded" force is both numerous enough and close enough to put itself astraddle of any issue by which the surrounded force may attempt to escape. Thus A in the accompanying diagram is, in a strategical sense, "surrounded" by B and C, though B and C do not form a ring round A. A cannot break through B or through C even though



each is inferior to his total forces because, if he does so, he will be set upon by C or by B. He cannot escape by the line X or Y, because B and C can put portions of their forces across that line the moment they see him moving, and before he can reach the issue.[1]

(4) A superior offensive force penetrating an enemy's country diminishes in the number of its

[1] The battle of Sedan is a perfect example of this.

effectives at the front more or less rapidly through losses by disease, etc., through the necessity of leaving men behind it in increasing numbers to guard communications, and from the increasing difficulty of provisioning the front with food, horses, and missile weapons as the length of the communications behind grows greater.

(5) The defensive inferior force retreating through its own territory has converse advantages corresponding to the disadvantage of the invader as he advances. It should increase in numbers by the calling up of further contingents, and the line of communications between it and its depots within the country growing shorter as the retreat proceeds, calls for less and less men and permits a more and more ample supply of munitions and remounts.

These conditions were highly emphasized on both sides in the case of Napoleon's invasion of Russia. The invader had miscalculated the effects of weather, the badness of the roads, and the opportunities of supply. His effective striking force at the front as he advanced diminished very rapidly. The native defending army, on the contrary, had behind it almost unlimited resources in new contingents to be successively called up, and

in the supply, especially of horses, for their commands.

(6) If, having divided the enemy into two forces, the offensive with its superior numbers can annihilate each of those forces separately, its success is complete; its object must be to crush, as soon as possible, one of the separated commands; it can thus turn its full force against the other, and its complete victory is assured in the early stages of a campaign. The enemy's forces being once divided, the grand purpose is to prevent their junction.[1]

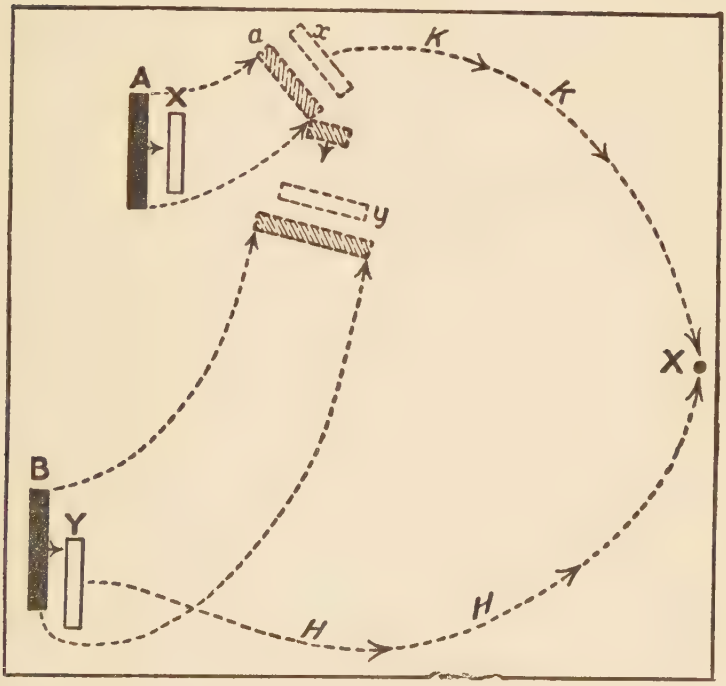
With these postulates in mind we can understand the operations Napoleon had designed.

Napoleon with his main command (A) proposed to drive Barclay (X) off in a northeasterly direction—that is, away from the other Russian command under Bagration (Y).

Napoleon could compel Barclay to retreat in any direction he, Napoleon, chose, because he

[1] Of all these simple elements, the war of 1870 gives excellent illustrations. The Germans invaded in superior force, separated the two main French commands, and before the length of their communications could begin to trouble them, while yet they were close to the frontier, they succeeded in annihilating one of the separated commands at Sedan, and were immediately free to turn their attention to the other body, which they contained in Metz. When this second body had surrendered—which was only a question of time—the regular forces of the French had ceased to exist.

commanded such greatly superior forces. Barclay (X) could not get away to the right or to the left; Napoleon (A) could always overlap



him and "shepherd" him towards any direction he might choose. He did not propose, however, to drive Barclay northward and eastward indefinitely. When he had driven him to the position marked

by the dotted oblong *x*, he proposed to stand in front of him there in the position marked by the shaded *a;* while the second portion of his army, that under Jerome, here marked B, was pursuing the next part of the general plan.

This next part of the general plan consisted in the shepherding of Bagration's 60,000 men from the position Y to the dotted position *y*. Bagration was bound to retreat in whatever direction Jerome, in command of B, might choose, supposing always that Jerome carried on his advance vigorously and continuously. For precisely the same reasons as those which compelled Barclay in his retreat to a direction imposed upon him by Napoleon's offensive, Bagration would be compelled in *his* retreat to any direction imposed upon him by the offensive of Jerome. Bagration could not strike off to the left or to the right any more than Barclay could because, as in the case of Barclay, the enemy being much more numerous than his own forces, overlapped him and could always head him off from the left or from the right at any such attempt. Bagration then, having been shepherded into the position *y*, would find himself surrounded by the enemy's forces in the sense in which we have used the word "surround" upon a previous page. He would have before and

behind him forces which, combined, were immensely superior to his own; he could neither break through them nor escape sideways.

Should this great and simple plan of Napoleon's mature without a hitch Bagration was doomed and the Russian campaign would have been decided (as was that of 1870) in the first few days. There might have been—as there was in 1870—prolonged resistance of an irregular kind, but the regular forces of the defensive would have been put out of action. One part of them (Bagration's at *y*) would have ceased to exist as a fighting force, and the other, that under Barclay at *x*, would then have found itself at issue with the whole mass of the Grand Army, at least three times its superior in number, not yet diminished by a lengthy advance, and able, in such superiority, to walk round the remaining Russian command, to contain it at will, or to drive it whither it would till, compelled to stand against some obstacle, it was doomed.

So stated, the strategic plan of Napoleon appears inevitably successful. It is always so in military history. If we put down mere numbers and positions the thing works out like a problem in mechanics. But the whole story of action under arms is determined by those least mechanical

of all factors, the human intelligence and the human will.

It will be apparent that the shepherding of Bagration northward until he was thrust up against Napoleon's command by Jerome and surrounded by the two main bodies of the invaders depended, as I have said, upon the active and continuous advance of Jerome himself. Supposing, for instance, that Jerome for some reason or another lay immovable for a couple of days or was negligent in sending bodies to head off any movement of Bagration to the right or to the left, then it is clear that Bagration would not be compelled to retreat in a direction imposed upon him by Jerome, but would be able to retire in any direction he chose. And knowing how greatly superior were the forces of Napoleon to those of his colleague Barclay, and how almost certainly those forces of Napoleon would be standing between him and that colleague, common sense would invite Bagration to try to get away to the right along the dotted line which I have marked H...H upon the diagram. This is precisely what happened. Jerome halted, confused and sluggish, in the very first stage of what should have been his rapid advance and pursuit of Bagration. He gave Bagration between three and four days' start, and, once this error had been

committed, all hope of shepherding the second Russian army northward and of trapping it against Napoleon's forces was lost. Bagration was free to escape directly eastward, and he did so along the line H...H.

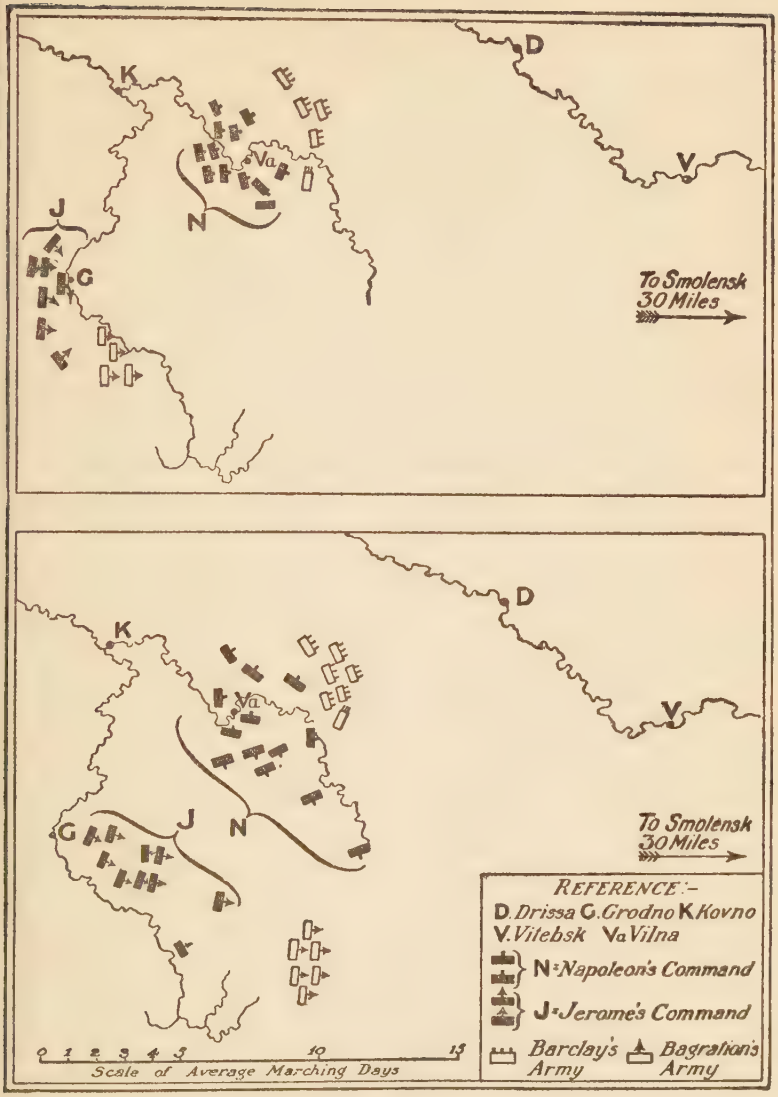
Not only did Napoleon through the misconduct of his brother Jerome thus fail to inclose and trap and so annihilate Bagration's 60,000 men, he also failed to prevent Bagration from ultimately effecting his junction with Barclay, and, what is more, this initial failure necessarily imposed upon Napoleon's advance a delay the effects of which were felt throughout the whole campaign. It was this delay which wasted the numerical strength of the Grand Army, which, therefore, permitted the Russians to render indecisive the action at Borodino, which brought what was left of the striking force of the invaders to Moscow from a month to six weeks late, which therefore in part caused the too late departure, and the catastrophe of the frozen retreat.

If it be asked why a failure produced by the negligence of but three days could have such considerable results of further delays to be measured in weeks, the plan I have set before the reader will answer that question.

It will be observed from the diagram upon page

55 that a certain immobility was imposed upon Napoleon's command while Jerome was supposed to be driving Bagration northward before him. The northern French forces, in the nature of the case, must be waiting, so to speak, with open arms, to receive the enemy which the southern French forces were supposed to be driving into those arms, and the main body was not planned to move forward until the destruction of Bagration had been accomplished. Further, the distance involved demanded for the coming and going of messages delays of from three to five days, and, as a general consequence of all these factors combined, Jerome, though he allowed Bagration to escape by a piece of sluggishness lasting over no more than half a week, checked his brother's campaign to the extent of a month and more. Barclay from *x* had the chance of escaping along the line K...K, and joining Bagration at X. He did so.

It was upon the last day of June that Jerome should have advanced. Already by the 4th of July Bagration was fairly free from danger. It was not until a week later, on the 11th, that Napoleon could co-ordinate all the news reaching him, and discover that the plan had failed. Before the end of the month Bagration and Barclay had joined hands in front of Smolensk.

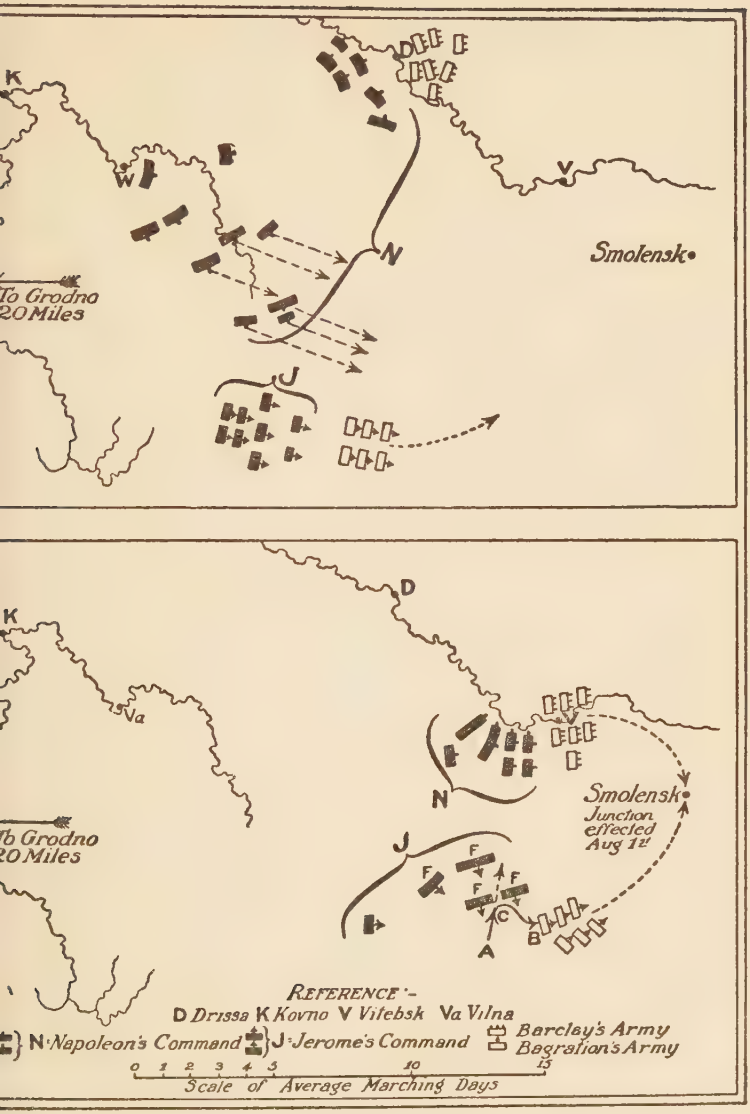

K
D
Va
V
N
J
G
To Smolensk
30 Miles
K
D
Va
V
G
J
N
To Smolensk
30 Miles
REFERENCE:-
D. Drissa G. Grodno K. Kovno
V. Vitebsk Va Vilna
N = Napoleon's Command
J = Jerome's Command
Barclay's Army
Bagration's Army
0 1 2 3 4 5 10 15
Scale of Average Marching Days

The actual movements whereby the two separated Russian forces escaped and their junction was effected before Smolensk may be followed in the four sketches herewith.

The topmost of these sketch maps on preceding page shows the position at the beginning of July. Napoleon's great northern command is all round and in front of Vilna, and is driving Barclay before it towards the north and east. Jerome, three or four days farther south in front of Grodno, has Bagration directly in front of him. It is his duty to pursue Bagration vigorously and drive him up towards Napoleon.

The second sketch, below, shows the situation a week later. Napoleon has driven Barclay before him and is holding him towards the northeast, whither Barclay is making for the fortified camp of Drissa; with other portions of his forces Napoleon is facing southward awaiting Bagration's army, which he hopes and believes Jerome is driving northward towards him. But, as we see by looking at this lower map, Jerome has failed to do anything of the sort. He has allowed Bagration four days' start, with the result that Bagration has got clean away towards the south and east.

In the next two maps opposite we see the failure of Napoleon's plan, consequent upon this escape


K
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B
To Grodno
20 Miles
REFERENCE :-
D Drissa K Kovno V Vitebsk Va Vilna
N Napoleon's Command
J Jerome's Command
Barclay's Army
Bagration's Army
0 1 2 3 4 5 10 15
Scale of Average Marching Days

of Bagration. In the top one Jerome's command J (now transferred to Davout) has indeed somewhat caught up Bagration, but too late to be able to shepherd the enemy towards the north, for the retreat has now passed farther east than the positions in which Napoleon stood to the northward to await Bagration's arrival. Those troops of his in the positions marked with arrows, which were to have closed in upon Bagration from the north, are now no longer useful for such an operation, and all that they can do is to march parallel with the southern army in the hope of still intervening between Barclay and Bagration. They go forward, therefore, along the dotted arrows indicated upon the map.

The lower and fourth sketch (on preceding page) shows the final failure, and deals with the last days of July. The southern French Army, now gravely dwindled (still marked with a J for the sake of clearness, though the command has been transferred to Davout), so far performs its task that, when Bagration tries to break through northward to join Barclay by a direct march along the line A...C, he is checked and has to turn back again along the line C...B. But it is no longer able to menace Bagration, who pursues his retreat on Smolensk at his leisure.

Meanwhile, to the north, Barclay, having abandoned the neighborhood of Drissa, D, and the fortified camp there, has come to Vitebsk, V, where he stands for a moment closely pursued by Napoleon's diminished front in close order. Napoleon's last hope is that Barclay will turn and accept battle in the neighborhood of Vitebsk, appreciating the diminished numbers of his opponents. But Barclay is too wise to do this. He continues his retreat, and at the end of the month, in front of Smolensk, joins hands with Bagration, with whose army his own forms one combined force on August 1.

Such were the steps whereby, through Jerome's sloth and Napoleon's neglect to drive him, the separated Russian armies escaped and combined. It was over a fortnight before the Grand Army, now heavily reduced by lengthening communications and the losses of these heavy futile operations, and delayed by change of plan and the difficulties of concentration, came up fully with the enemy at Smolensk.

V

IT was Friday, August 14, 1812; four weeks to a day since the Emperor's carriage had driven out of Vilna by the Sventsianouï way, going eastward and northward up the stream, pressing along the Moscow road.

The imperial tent—very little other canvas about it, even the greatest consented to bivouac—was pitched by the highway side at Siniaki, where the marshes lie between the forest and the great Moscow road. An hour or two ahead was the place, near Krasnoi town, where the vanguard had taken contact. The enemy were now surely held to action! Two days' march more ahead, say thirty miles, and Smolensk, with its stores, such defenses as it had, its political meaning, must surely bid the Russians stand! There, perhaps, this endless pursuit into the wilds might end, and the war end also in an action settling all. The men of the Grand Army thought themselves upon the eve of a decision—but it was to fail them.

There marched with the staff of the army a general officer whose position was subordinate

in the great scheme of that largest of the old campaigns. He saw with his own eyes the turning-point in the war. I write from his testimony.

That turning-point was the moment in which Napoleon, having occupied Smolensk but failed to cut off the now united Russian forces, yet determined—to his ruin—to pursue ceaselessly that final victory which fled him and escaped him as ceaselessly up the Moscow road.

The feast day of the Emperor, that day upon which he had fixed for the national recognition of his name, was the Assumption, August 15. Upon that day also, a thousand years before, Roland had fallen in Roncesvalles.

For the first time since the beginning of his ride athwart Christendom in arms Napoleon let that day pass unnoticed. He was impatient of his courtiers. He would not receive the ritual acknowledgments of the Feast, for an issue was near at hand.

Instead of ceremonial he questioned prisoners. He learned the junction of his foes. He was told (falsely enough) that Smolensk town might have been already abandoned by the Russians before the Sunday dawned. He knew not whether to believe this or no; but in Smolensk or beyond it he immediately expected battle. The great town

now lay but little more than one day's march eastward from where Napoleon in those hours was questioning and discovering—groping.

That day the whole army marched in bulk for the coming shock, and by the morrow, Sunday, the 16th, it was hoped that the Grand Army could bring the whole Russian forces, whose junction Jerome had so unhappily permitted, to a throw. The Grand Army had dwindled. Its men were seen patched and botched and broken in shoe leather. Some say that here and there were a few already barefoot. Many of its guns lacked a full team.

Much of its cavalry was dismounted. It had lost, without a battle and in little more than seven weeks, one-third of its effectives. It had already come to pillaging, almost as a system, in spite of reprimand, of execution, and of the occasional high example of particular commanders straining the obedience of their particular corps. In spite of all the delay at Vilna, food was not following as it should, and countless thousands had, for lack of ovens, boiled the raw wheat stolen from country granaries in handfuls, and on such provisions proceeded.

The morning of that Sunday, then, August 16, 1812, saw before daylight the great mass of troops

(confined to the neighborhood of one road and almost confined to that one road itself) pressing eastward. As they broke up for the day's march this General Officer of whom I speak heard far off to the eastward a sound of firing. It was the first shots of what all hoped would be the climax of the advance. The enemy in that long orderly retreat which had culminated in this final junction of his had not lost a gun. Now he should be made to stand.

But though the staff heard such far-off firing, it was not until the late afternoon that its meaning was discovered or that the scene of the approaching action lay before their eyes.

That firing had but marked a renewed contact between the advance guard of the Grand Army and the rearguard of an enemy who was still falling back before it; and what was seen on the late Sunday afternoon from the low rolling ground, traversed by small ravines (which fall northward and to the left, carrying little muddy streams to the broad Dnieper), were the dull red walls, the shining cupolas, the garden trees of Smolensk.

The town lay upon that south bank of the river by which Napoleon's army also had come, along the main Moscow road. It climbed from the flats of the river bank up the slight, bare rise to the

south and the road line. A bridge united it with the farther shore.

Beyond this bridge a northern suburb ran up other low heights across the river, and upon these the troops of Barclay's army could be seen; their fires, already lit, began to show against the evening.

Facing the French advance, a long brick wall, ancient, crenellated, and broken here and there with somewhat ruinous towers, came up the slope from the Dnieper's bank to the inconspicuous height of the plateau above, thrust out at a salient angle a citadel somewhat more modern (but in no condition for a true defense), then turned round in its sweep to encircle the whole city, and so come back to the Dnieper. Its three sides thus hiding the town, but showing, above its thirty feet, painted and metaled church domes, roofs, and trees, was more than three, less than four, miles in length from the river round again to the river. There was no fighting outside the walls in the wooden suburbs (though these were held by Bagration's men) nor any further exchange of shots upon that night.

The enemy, within and without, were still; but they had stood, and next day—at last!—surely

the blow would be struck that should crown the war.

Before it was quite dark Napoleon had ridden round, well outside the wooden suburbs, from where upon the west the wall left the river to where upon the east it reached it again; he noted the deep ditch, the absence of modern earthwork, the nature of the obstacle before him. In that night he bent his vast host in a bow from the river to the river, parallel with, though somewhat distant from, the walls; for himself, with the Guard, he pitched his tent behind the center of that arc, and so awaited the morning.

The French lay that night in bivouac. Few tents sheltered them. One was the Emperor's, and near it, in bivouac also, this General Officer of whom I speak awaited, with his companions, attack upon the morrow; for Napoleon had both imagined that an attempt would be made from the buildings to advance and break his line, and had also desired such an opening. Sundry advances through the suburbs on the day before had led Napoleon to believe or to hope that a general action might be fought before the walls.

But with the next morning, Monday, the 17th of August, no movement upon the enemy's part betrayed any such desire to force a decision. The

Russians had preferred to take advantage of their defenses in the suburbs, their field earthworks, and in the last resort, perhaps, the city wall—that age-worn covering—and themselves to await the assault.

This strange hesitation upon the one part and the other, this silence between the armies, lasted until two o'clock in the afternoon. Had the Emperor preferred to despise that ten-foot rampart of brick, to neglect the political value of the city, to cross the Dnieper above the town, to cut the road between Barclay's command and Moscow, he might have accomplished something decisive. He might at least have compelled a general action. He chose to judge that the capture of Smolensk would be, politically, as much to him as a battle. So it would have been in *his* Europe of that day. But the Emperor was not in his Europe, he was in Russia.

Such was the continued error. He doubted not that the capture of the city would serve all his needs, and in those first hours of the Monday afternoon he ordered the attack.

The suburbs were carried. Not easily, but hotly and at a sharp expense. Such of the Russian troops as lay without the city were driven within. The batteries were turned upon the walls.

But the cannon turned upon those old and sullen defenses affected them at first so little in their huge mass that older men who remembered the campaign in Palestine compared the resistance of such antique material to the walls of St. John of Acre, which had similarly stood a similar battering of iron. Night fell before any breach had been made, and the Emperor's orders ran that the assault should be put off until the next morning, Tuesday, the 18th. The day's work was but half done, and yet it had been hard, though it had consisted but in driving the few divisions before the wall into the town. It had cost the Emperor in killed and wounded perhaps 9,000, certainly 8,000 men.

A little before sunrise of that 18th of August certain men of the 15th Regiment were the first to approach the walls and to find them untenanted. They met with no resistance; no musket was fired. They passed through the gates into the town. They found that in the night the Russian troops within the four-mile circle of brick had passed the river to the north; and as the French forces poured in regular columns through the streets of Smolensk this General Officer, following with the staff, saw on all sides the smoldering of new fires where the Russians had begun the burning of the town.

The bridge across the Dnieper to the northern suburb was broken; a long and useless fusillade was exchanged that afternoon and evening between the two banks of the river, but nothing more was done. Napoleon was established in Smolensk; that was all—and in the night his enemy, now concentrated upon the farther northern bank, fell back once more along the Moscow road.

Nothing whatever had been done. The Emperor had failed. In a longer history I might show how and why this valueless victory was the turning-point of his fate. He might have contained the united Russian armies; he might have cut their retreat upon Moscow. But he had misunderstood their intention. He had waited for them where they would not attack. He had himself attacked where his attack could lead to no final conclusion. He found himself upon the Tuesday night in possession of a place, and of a name, and of an area upon the map: but not of victory. Every man and every gun had escaped him, and with the next morning the eternal pursuit was renewed. There had been no decision. The hands of the Grand Army had met and clasped the air.

Among the troops that poured into the town that day my General Officer noted contingents so young that they seemed no more than boys. In the open

places of the city these were drilled as though they were still recruits (which, indeed, they were), and as though they had not yet completed their training (as, indeed, they had not) to come into line with made soldiers.

Yet they bore the uniform of the Young Guard. And when he spoke with their officers at the fall of night, they told him that these lads whom he had so seen drilling, even in the heart of Russia, and not yet sure of the handling of a musket, nor yet taught their manual fully, were levies that had marched day after day continuously from Paris —1,500, 1,600 mortal miles! And when he asked whether many had not fallen out, they told him: Yes, many had fallen out and died by the way.

The army still hungered. There was not much food in Smolensk.

VI

I HAVE said that the hands of the Grand Army had met upon Smolensk and clasped the air. Such disappointments disturb the judgment of soldiers.

Still, in that third week of August (the weather changing now to heat, an open sky, a small sun, and a shimmering air above the troops), the enemy, intact to a gun and to a wagon, was before them; and still the pursuers were challenged, with a sort of mockery, to pursuit by the pursued.

Such uncalculated and impulsive things do not determine the decisions of a great captain: but they make up the air wherein those decisions are fixed.

Bonaparte should have halted at Smolensk.

To prove it, review those things which we know and which he knew—eliminating the things which time permits us to know and which he did not.

He knew that he was now in occupation of true Russian soil and not to be dislodged. He knew that he had freed the last of the Polish provinces. He knew that the organization of such a zone would

mean the permanent establishment of a frontier, behind the bulwarks of which an enthusiastic people, great in war, the Poles, would firmly support him, and be a foundation for all future effort. He knew that the Europe which he was remolding, the Europe of the Roman order, was now fully made, and would in any future support him in the subjugation of Byzantine or Barbaric Marches.

So much for what was positive in the view he must have held.

He was a creator and he knew his creation. He was creating once more a united Europe. That Europe would stand united (did he give it but time to settle) whether in defense against, or in chastisement of, lesser things around its boundaries. It would stand united in spite of the misspent ignorance wherein a few ex-centric Northern regions submitted to the rule of a rich few. The momentum of all our past is towards a new establishment of one rule over all Western men. We must remake the Empire. It is in our blood and it will come. Almost, by 1812, had Napoleon satisfied that need, and the soul of Europe was behind him.

He knew all that—a moral thing. He had it certainly in his mind. It was the soul of the French effort. It was the thing of which he had

been the captain; for the Revolutionary armies were inspired, and their ride was a Crusade.

Simple men, for whose peace it is necessary that they should explain even the greatest of human dooms in a very narrow fashion, may consider nothing more in this our lower day than the ambition of a man whose ambition had been fed as had no other man's. Give that disturbing element all the weight you will, yet it does not explain why Napoleon did not halt at Smolensk. Even the smaller fools, whose ambition is limited to their skins, can calculate, and this man, in whom there ran, sensibly personified, the energy of twenty European years, was too ambitious; yet he did not commit his error through the blindness, at least, of ambition.

He should have halted at Smolensk. He should have confirmed his advance; he should have waited for the next year before he attempted to go farther, or (perhaps without going farther) to impose a general peace and a general order upon an enfranchised world.

Why did he not do so?

I have reviewed the very general scheme: the physical things he saw, the lack of supplies, the endless plains, which should have persuaded him: negative arguments which should have made the

restraint upon him stronger still. In particular should facts, landscape, numbers, have weighed on him, because such things of a concrete, detailed, material sort particularly appeal to those greater minds which are capable of lasting visions, as was his mind. They are the sanest of minds and the most at one with reality.

Napoleon knew that the attempt to move so vast a body of men was imperilled by Nature herself on account of the length of his communications in such an unexpected land. He had now *seen* Russia. He had read written page upon written page of dispatch concerning the horses dead, the young men falling out and dying, the wastage, the occasional famine, the stragglers, and the mud. His own corporeal senses had appreciated this truth—that he had passed the boundaries of his known Europe, and that he was adventuring himself into very strange conditions of soil, of harvest, of water, of human thought. He had seen the cold ruins of burned houses. He had entered villages destroyed, the homes of peasants sacrificed by their fellow-countrymen in retreat. He had now left to his hand (should he determine to continue the march) not half of the men with whom he had intended to strike a decisive blow: the blow which he had hoped to strike

so soon after the passage of the Niemen. With one day's march and another, with the unrolling of his communications mile upon mile, how that already shrunken force would dwindle!

Napoleon should have called a halt to all that vast effort at Smolensk. The name of that town has still some meaning on the map of Europe to-day. It is a strategic name in modern war. It should by rights have come to have a corresponding meaning in the history of modern Europe. It should now stand for a bastion which Napoleon should have thrust out eastward and held, while behind it he was organizing (or rather the Europe which he had guaranteed was organizing for him) a restoration of settled living. The name of Smolensk should stand for the re-establishment of Europe. It has inherited no such fame. It is still a nodal point of some strategical importance, but it means little in the European ear, and it means little because Napoleon, who should have halted there, did not halt.

Napoleon knew that the summer now far advanced meant a decay of forage (within two months there would be none). He knew that the conditions of the problem before him—should he advance yet farther—involved a risk outside his calculations and outside his power of calcu-

lation. Napoleon also knew that this endless flat into which he was thrusting was something Napoleon did not know. Why did he determine to go forward?

I think I can answer that question. It was not the success of his distant wings to the right or the left, nor was it alone the presumption that the holding of Moscow, because it was a capital, would mean the control of a people. It was the effect of experience upon a soul all alive with experience. Time and again, from the days when he had first heard the "Marseillaise," there had struck—sharp, immediate, and deep—into the memory of this Gunner the result of a decision. Force a battle and win it. When you have won it all your complexities are resolved. You have killed the cat. Is not that the whole meaning of Arcola, of Austerlitz, of Friedland? Is it not also the driving power of a man—the desire to reach one clear end? And of all men soldiers are most fully men. Experience, the closest of guides, held Napoleon tight and, as it were, grasped his right wrist, drew him forward, forcing him into unwisdom.

Another great man, worthy of perpetual admiration, said of the enemy's fleet that one should find it first, and when one had found it, "sink,

burn, and destroy." The mighty armies of which the Emperor had been, by a good chance, for so many years the captain, had perpetually solved new problems in that final fashion. He thought: "If I can bring them to stand (and at last, at last I shall), *then* I shall break them. They will be no more. That done, this campaign, like all my others, will be resolved at once and will have achieved its end."

Therefore, he went forward. . . . But he was wrong. In any form of effort it is your business to achieve. Since that effort involves some opposition from men or from things, it is your business to overcome that opposition. If you would overcome you must put the elements of the problem to yourself in their entirety, in their right order, in their proportion, and you must determine to avoid every call whatsoever which distracts you from your one goal. A rule, a memory, an experience, a mode of thought must never be allowed to deflect the direction of your effort to confuse clear reason. If you allow such a deflection, and if it be serious, you will fail. You must want one thing, not two. Now, Napoleon setting forward from Smolensk in this third week of August, 1812, allowed an experience, a memory, a habit—the effect of past pitched battles won—to color and

therefore to cloud clear reason. He had two incompatible pictures before his mind: one the nature of the problem; the other, habit, or memory: victory immediate. He trusted the last. He went forward.

VII

WHEN that interior spiritual thing was done, that turning-point in the great story of the wars, and when the march upon Moscow was ordered and Smolensk was left behind, the sky changed.

It was as though upon a decision so momentous a sacramental stamp of natural things must be affixed by whatever power oversaw from above those columns crawling to their doom over the 700 miles.

From earth two mingled things most impressed the onlookers of that event: first, after that cold rain, the sudden, unexpected heat, with its dust and sweat and maddening weight in so packed a body of men; next, the grandeur of the massed advance.

The beginning of the tragedy was ominous of its end.

The day following the occupation of Smolensk, after a sharp (and futile) action against the continuous retreat of the enemy, the Emperor reviewed his troops in splendor among the dead.

That these troops were now barely half of those whom he had led forward across the frontier mattered not (he thought) if they should prove sufficient to force the Russians to that final decision, the appetite for which was now fixed in him, and upon which his experience had made sure that the issue of the war should lie.

After such losses Napoleon could give promotion with a large hand, and an eagle to a new regiment, and crosses to the surviving brave, and, what was better for the soldiery, or at least the central French mass thereof, show himself on horseback still leading them onward towards the East. The review so passed among the dead of that upland (men stepping over corpses to get to their places in the line, and recruits as they took their dressing glancing sideways at the twisted bodies of men), the army went forward. It was to go forward for twenty days.

All, all those twenty days under the terrible sun, blinded, confused, and hidden in a conflagration of dust, it pursued and pursued; and ever, night after night, men heard in the bivouacs some rumor: that the enemy had stood, was standing . . . no, had moved forward. The shots heard had been no more than one of those ceaseless actions between vanguard and rearguard which had

marked now five weeks of an unending trudge through the plains. Town after town and village after village went by: abandoned by their rich, half abandoned by their poor, burned and ravaged by those who had gone before; their stores also destroyed by the enemy as he perpetually fell back.

The wide road between its borders of trees was sandy and now quite dry. The rain, having done its work and killed off the horses so many miles behind and ruined the communication for that fortnight at Vilna, had wholly ceased, and baked sand and clay made a dust quite intolerable. It rose from the first ranks of the huge host like a swarm of flies, and it filled the air through which the broad column pushed. The eyes and the lips of the men were crusted in it, and there was an awful thirst, and for that thirst there was no water.

Even in the good lands of the West, where there are quiet rivers, and so many of them—little chalk streams at every mile in Normandy—an army massed may lack water. A battery halted at some high village drinks the springs dry, or the horses trampling the rivulet make it difficult to serve the men coming after them. But here in this huge, measureless, dull land, near the partings

of its great rivers and in its driest lift, after the few days of parching there was no water for the men.

I think that if the ruin of the Grand Army and the mortal cold of the succeeding winter had not so struck the imagination of men, this heat and thirst of the last of the advance would have remained terrible in history. All who suffered it had of it a sharp visualized memory which appears vivid in their recollections and their writings where their story of the succeeding cold and famine is confused. For men were still eager and lively: they were still fed after a fashion, in spite of their distress. The wealthier, who could write and judge, were in full command of themselves, and expected victory. *Their* impression of that new, pitiless hot sun and of that execrable caking dirt and of that tormenting thirst must be read to be known.

There was a man from under the Jura who died a general, and who in one page has put the thing very clearly before us. He has put also before us the vision of the packed thousands pressing forward.

As for the road, he says, between its tall trees, the guns and the train took it up altogether, mile upon mile of wheels; and the heavy business, for the most part under-horsed, always filled it as a

river fills its bed. Upon either side of the fields that flanked this wide track across the waste went the army. It went thus: Infantry upon a front of eighty men to the right of the road and to the left, and then, outside the infantry, farther to the right and to left, the cavalry, by squadrons.

As for the grandeur of so immense a thing, he has in his simple notes this:—

"During this march, in one clear moment when a halt had been ordered long enough to let the dust settle, I received a certain pleasure: I saw the columns of the heavy Cavalry, the two arms, the Carabineers and the Cuirassiers, fourteen regiments of helmets and of breastplates catching the sun. I thought it an admirable spectacle!"

I could wish that some contemporary had stood in flank and had seen the whole huge mass still pressing forward, seven score thousand men and more, dribbling out as it went the thin lines of its communications, lessening from day to day by such a wastage and by stragglers, by sick, by dead. The bulk of it expected glory, and was breathing through and through, even at all these leagues from home, with the certitude of victory at last under their Commander, who had never known defeat. But there is no such witness. All those who saw and wrote were in the dust of the column.

Let me end my brief note of this trial under the sun with a very little picture. Napoleon had grown anxious. Moscow was still 200 miles ahead. Hitherto, he had encouraged the presence of private carriages in the great mass of wheeled things that oppressed the road. Wealthy men, no matter of what rank in their commission, were not too closely asked whether some carriage of theirs had followed the army, for Napoleon judged that every one such rolling thing carried food, and that this food might later be commandeered. On this account there were to be found here and there, among the wagons and the guns, carriages of a sort that recalled Paris, Vienna, Munich, and Berlin. There was a captain who boasted that his coachman and his coach had come from Paris all the way. To be accurate, it was a cabriolet.

Now the Emperor was determined to be rid of every unauthorized wheel. He had gone too far for any such burdens. He gave orders that they should be left behind, and that those that still dared to edge themselves in behind the wagons should be sought out and burned.

On the day of this order Napoleon, riding down the thick, dusty line between the marching regiments and the road where the wheeled vehicles ran, saw a fine yellow carriage on wheels. The

name of its owner is lost to us, but it was a fine yellow carriage. "Set fire to that!" he said. It was the early morning. The bivouac fires still smoldered, and red brands were brought from one such heap and put beneath this thing. The Emperor watched the smoke rising, then, bored, rode off—certain that his will had been done. But as he and his officers disappeared, the men about that yellow coach put out the fire, and the yellow coach went on its way.

The French army is a sort of great family. It has lasted near two thousand years, and its story is full of domestic incidents, nice, nasty, and odd, glorious, and from time to time supreme, and on occasions changing all the world.

So that particular chapter of the army's story, that particular body of its age-long membership went forward, till the first days of September found it within a hundred miles of Moscow, and still the undefeated enemy before and the wake over the plains behind.

VIII

IN the night between Sunday the 6th and Monday the 7th of September it was chill after sunset: the Emperor slept very ill. The crisis of his effort was at hand. For now some days it had been certain that the enemy would stand and that his battle would be granted to him. It was the last position before Moscow. The Russians had thrown up earth; after all Napoleon's gradual depletion—their continual recruitment—they were now his equals in number. They had determined to accept battle. His tent was pitched not two miles from the low crest of the line they had entrenched.

Napoleon had a cold; it was a feverish one, with a hard cough, and his voice was failing him. It had been painful for him to dictate orders. But the anxiety of that night had not been mainly physical with him. It had been an anxiety for the action of the morrow. He feared lest his great action should escape him: the retreat of the enemy—600 miles of it—had almost bred in him a superstition as to this. And though he now

knew well that they were in position just before him, and that he held them certainly, yet hour after hour in the night he rose and hoarsely asked whether it was certain, from the lights along their line, that they were standing. At times, what with his illness and the darkness about him, he doubted of victory. One had seen him by the light of the candle in the tent awake and mournful, leaning his head upon his hands. Then he had gone to the door of the tent and suddenly asked the private soldier of the Guard there, whether the Guard had had their rations served that day. He was reassured. He thirsted also as the fever grew on him.

With the dawn his energy returned, but there was no vivacity now in his step. Some thought as they saw him coming out under the early morning (which was cold and the wind still rising) that his soul had grown oddly dull to the great business of war; others that his illness confused and lowered his power. All of this was (and remains) guesswork; but Napoleon on the threshold of Borodino was certainly something more somber or less hopeful, and with less of life in him than those who had lived out with him those twenty years of war, his companions, desired.

Just as the sun had risen into a sky then cloud-

less, Napoleon sat upon the slope of an earthwork which crowned a little knoll, immediately to the south of a village called Shevardino.

This earthwork the Russians had thrown up hastily to retard the French advance. It had been taken (and retaken), and finally occupied by the French upon the Saturday evening. In that spot, and almost in that one attitude, the Emperor remained all day, receiving there the news from the firing line before him, and sending thence his too rare and too incomplete orders. He sat with his pocket glasses in his hand, still coughing, suffering more and more from his disorder as the day proceeded, and watching the chances of the encounter before him.

Napoleon looked due east.

Some two thousand yards before him, a line two miles long of slightly lifted land made an horizon. That inconspicuous crest was the enemy. Beyond this crest, where the land rose somewhat higher, there was nothing to be seen. On its left it fell into a depression where ran the stream of the Kolotza. On its right (and from where he looked he was more to the right than to the left of the center) it faded imperceptibly away into the immense plain which was the note not only of

that one vision, but of Heaven knows how many days and how many miles of advance.

Down in the depression upon the left, or north, at the end, therefore, of the crest as he saw it, was a village (hidden from him in its hollow) which the enemy had intrenched; it was called Borodino. Verbal accident will probably give this name a great fame in history, for most of the peoples of Europe chose to remember the struggle by the name of that village.

As for the French, the proximity of the River Moscowa, the suggestion it bears of the capital they must die to reach, their advance towards that possibly defended line, all combined lead them to speak by the title of Moscowa when they relate the engagement. The names are still debated: they are a small matter. More than 70,000 men fell. A little less than a quarter of a million faced each other in fairly equal numbers—numbers that will never be exactly determined; the intrenched defenders were somewhat less, I think, than those who attacked upon that day.

Plainly before Napoleon and to the right again of that defended low crest the position of his enemy rose, as I have said, on to the great plain, broken by the rolls of the land; and there one of those patches of wood, marshy, difficult, dense,

which dot all that flat expanse, marked the last of the Russian extension to their left, the south.

The thing Napoleon watched, the little rise of land, was marked by three things which a soldier should remember. You may make them five if you count that village of Borodino, which he could hardly see, and that wood at the other end of the Russian line, the southern end. But between that extreme left of the Russian line, as he saw it, and that extreme right to which, dark as it lay against the rising dawn, Napoleon turned his glasses (sitting on the slope of the redoubt, coughing, suffering in the throat, hoarser and hoarser whenever he had occasion to speak), three points, I say, fixed his attention.

They were these: First and most important, upon a prominent small mound, which lay not as far north as Borodino, but nearer the center, he saw a principal redoubt, very broad in its front, very heavily gunned, a big business. Perhaps a mile farther on to the right along the crest (but not quite a mile) a village half destroyed, the name of which was Semenovskoi, and to the right of this again, but a little thrust forward upon slightly higher ground before this village, he saw a few smaller works of the sort which the French call "arrow-heads," *flèches,* angles of earth jutted for-

ward against an enemy, but not closed. Neither, for that matter, was the great redoubt closed in its rear. All were open works, which, if an enemy takes them, are still exposed to fire from the retreating occupants.

He saw, under the dawn and the clear sky, and watched as the gale rose (for it now blew a violent gale) this line of ground. Behind him where he sat was massed in imposing order his Guard, which that day did not strike, save indeed by the advance of its artillery. An onlooker has told us how those veterans stood to arms behind their Captain, an amphitheater of men, watching, baffled in their desire to decide the incomplete wrestling that was to follow.

But in front of Napoleon, in those dense, not regular, formations of the Empire, ran from right to left, from south to north, over two miles of slightly falling ground, and on the high ground beyond the Kolotza facing the slight Russian crest, all that was here left of the Grand Army.

When they should be ordered to attack, this was their task: the left under Eugène to occupy Borodino, and then both those who had occupied that village and those a little more in view of the Emperor and nearer him to combine for a forcing of the great redoubt. Those to the right again

(just before Napoleon) to force the *flèches*. Those upon the extreme right, not before Napoleon, but southward of where he sat upon the grass, to push their way if they could through that wood, and, by threatening the flank of the enemy which held the *flèches*, to support the attack upon those works.

The Emperor's plan was as simple as was his enemy's position. It was a straightforward attack: blows in the face; beginning with cannon, followed by the charges of the line, supported continually by all that was left of the horse—until he should have smashed up and powdered the one organized human thing that lay between him and the administration of Russia (as he believed it to lie) at Moscow—seventy miles away. To maneuver the Russians out of the way was damnably easy, but by so doing he would have left their army intact—and he was 600 miles from tolerable roads, from flour, from powder, from lead, from remounts, from everything. He had to do this thing with what was left after the loss of stragglers, of killed, of wounded, of men on communications, of inefficients, and that loss was now far more than half of the main force which had crossed the Niemen.

Take a soldier's estimate, I mean the enumeration of particular corps and particular regiments,

and follow in detail their efficients; you find that the units which struck at the Russian line between Borodino and The Wood could have counted at the crossing of the Niemen 300,000 men at least. Now those that were to spend themselves upon this Monday, September 7, were certainly not 130,000, and probably not much more than 120,000 men.

The sun was still low, it had not risen an hour. It was a little after six o'clock when the old signal of the Revolution in action, the warning gun, boomed in the silence: then came the bugle calls, and the first troops moved to the attack.

IX

WHAT did Napoleon see as he looked through his glasses that day? And what did he hear of the fight which rolled up before him its two-mile line of smoke to be blown like a storm-cloud past him upon the howling wind?

First he saw, flashing from the left to the right of the line, point after point of fire where the heavy Russian pieces opened against his own batteries: the heavy Russian guns behind the two groups of earthwork, and the Russian fieldpieces in the mile between those two groups. And that cannonade was continued up northward to the extreme of the position: to where the slight plateau dipped down into the hollow of Borodino. This service of the Russian guns, answering the furious discharge of his own three hundred pieces ranked upon the slope below him, opened the great duel with an enormous noise which filled the shallow ravine of the Semenovskoi brook, making waves in the smoke of it.

Next came the distant sound of musketry firing in the dip where Borodino itself lay; he saw troops

disappearing into that hollow, and the whiffs rising on that extreme left also told him that Eugène was engaged in carrying the village; though from where he sat the ground just hid its houses. The first message that reached him of the development of his plan was the message that the village was taken.

But as that news reached him, or perhaps a little before, the double advance upon the great redoubt in the Russian center, upon the *flèches* a mile farther up the Russian line, was already in progress.

The cannon fire had filled with dense fumes the depression between the height from which he watched and the position of the enemy upon the sky-line, but the violence of the wind whirled that smoke away in great rolls, and through such gaps he could perceive the contact between his columns and the defense. To the deafening continuous crash of more than six hundred guns, the one line answering the other, now came from that mile away before him, all along the slope of the ridge, the general rattle of musketry, and far off upon the right, in the wood, isolated shots which told him with what difficulty the marshy thickets were being slowly forced (and at first failed to be

forced) by those whose business it was to press round the end of the Russian left.

The morning grew, the wind rose still higher. The fury of the struggle upon the intrenched line he gauged by the advance farther and farther forward of his deep formations and, as it were, the swallowing up of men: the thousands as they pushed on against the earthworks, melted when they neared the batteries as a leaden bar melts moved up towards white-hot iron. It was so with the attempt upon the great redoubt: it was so with the attempt upon the *flèches;* and Napoleon knew as he gazed that in the first shock the resistance had held good.

It had done more than hold good. His glass first told him (and immediately afterwards a detailed message explained) that the great redoubt of the center, rushed for a moment by cavalry on its flank, had been recaptured by the enemy. That confused whirlpool of men which made a patch all about it, seen for one moment and then for another in visions through the driven clouds of smoke, was upon the whole a mass pushed backwards; and the Russian guns behind its low parapets, which had for a short time ceased their fire, spoke out again and proved that the enemy had recovered his hold. A mile to the right, where was

the group of *flèches,* a struggle as confused but not so fluctuating roared but marked time. The works were not forced, and the human mass pressed inelastically against, or not quite against, those low walls of earth, sloping too easily, sandy, almost imperceptible, wherein the guns were not silenced. And still in the wood to his extreme right beyond, the firing, irregular and lessened, proved how little had been done.

It was near noon when a sort of halt or hesitation came upon this first wrestling—and the French had not carried the crest.

During that space, which was brief, the musketry was hardly heard, and only the guns kept up that hell of theirs which filled all the skies above the armies. It was the moment also when Napoleon heard (and the news seems to have left him little moved) that certain cavalry of the enemy had got round Borodino to the left, and were there attempting to menace the flank of Eugène. The Emperor's indifference to such an episode was well judged. Two thousand odd mounted men (they were no more, and he could not see them for trees, and for the lay of the ground) could not menace the Northern third of so great a host as his.

With the first of the afternoon the effort was

renewed. Upon the right, against the *flèches*, that lull was far less pronounced than where the great redoubt had been recovered, and the French had rolled back from the center. But at any rate, however slight and confused was the break between the first and the second part of that day, the Emperor in the third hour after its first failure or check saw plainly the first signs of success, and the reports brought in to him made those signs plainer still. He saw the new attack of the reinforced columns before him: the *flèches* were carried. No guns now answered from the Russian left, until, after a silence during which the Grand Army showed against the sky, he heard the Russian guns again, now farther off and hidden by the hill. But though the *flèches* had gone, the great redoubt still stood. Its fire in flank threatened the French success upon their right. The afternoon was passing: the Emperor must pay any price for that great redoubt or fail altogether.

He sent his orders then up to the left, and within the hour, between half-past two and three o'clock, he saw them bear their fruit. Once more the clouds of smoke about the great redoubt rose, and were rifted by the wind, and he heard for a second time the cessation of its fire. And then, while the issue for the second time seemed doubtful, he

saw the great mass of his cavalry charging in the open mile between the two Russian works, wheeling to the left, taking the redoubt in reverse and destroying the defense of it altogether. His men were swarming over all the crest: it was held, and the afternoon was not yet done. The sun was yet to serve them for three hours and more, the daylight for four, when the whole position, as he saw it cutting the sky, was thick no longer with a struggle, but with the French Army holding all the ridge that had formed the Russian line.

More than this Napoleon could not see; and here it is that the sequel, the last neglected hours (neglected of set purpose as some say, as others say from indecision), must be explained, not as they would have been seen by the Emperor, watching from the old work by Shevardino (for the whole Russian line, now retired behind the crest, was lost to his view), but as they were seen by the soldiers who had forced the Russian works and now could look eastward toward the depression of the Gorki brook beyond.

Eastward beyond that crest, as the French gained it and could see new land beyond, there was what the eye took to be a dead level plain though it did slope slightly away, and there, still in formation, still intact, though having lost upon

the slight ridge they had abandoned one-third of their forces, the Russians stood and continued to fire gun for gun. The cavalry and infantry struggle had ceased. All that remained was a cannonade; and the French line (it had lost a quarter of its effectives) stood exhausted on the ground it had seized.

It was just past three o'clock.

It was at this critical moment (the first position of the enemy carried after more terrible a loss, more clamorous a shock of men, more awful a cannonade than any of all the great wars in all the twenty years), it was in this fourth hour of the afternoon that, by a sort of universal judgment in his subordinates, Napoleon (who now for ten hours had remained in one place immovable) should have lit one of those flames of enthusiasm which the sight of him had so often lit at the close of a great action. He should, they said, have called upon the Guard; he should already have moved it forward while the struggle for the redoubt was proceeding; he should now have launched it at the new Russian position and attempted, by that fresh attack, the rupture of the enemy's line and a decision; he should have mounted his horse and gone forward with them across the dip of the Semenovskoi brook; his

presence, their arrival, would have determined the day.

His impassivity, or rather his sadness, had struck all those about him in those hours. Their testimony is too general, in too communal an agreement, to be doubted. It was as though his will no longer burned. Yet he himself later coldly defended his action, and great judges of war have told us that, now he might make sure of Moscow—since he believed that position to be his goal—to have risked his Reserve might have undone the work of all the earlier day.

At any rate, no orders followed. The Guard, impatient, but unmoving, still stood in their great amphitheater behind him. He still sat watching the mile-off ridge, now quiet, listening to the firing beyond it. He did no more than to send forward one great body of his guns. He did indeed, about four o'clock, mount and ride forward to discuss the position with his generals in the line, but he went alone. He came back, walking his horse to the place he had left. His face was fevered and disturbed, his hair disordered. He dismounted and still watched the crest a mile away as the evening gathered, hearing no musketry but only the boom of his guns. And even as night fell, and right on into the darkness, from the Russian line

in its new position a mile back there still came steadily the answering fire.

When it was quite dark and the business of Borodino was done, the Russian army which Napoleon had hungered to bring to action and to destroy was not dispersed, it was not contained, it had not even lost the Moscow road.

There is often a dispute whether a battle may not be called a true victory if its immediate issue, its tactical result, is an advance: for instance, Malplaquet. But history deals only with the fruit and result of the whole campaign, and Borodino had failed to achieve any such result or fruit. The Moscowa may be called a victory: it was not a decision. That exhausted cavalry with no remounts at all, with its beasts half starved, and dying in their hundreds of fatigue and famine alone, had almost disappeared in the great charges. Certainly one man in four—some say one man in three—of those whose business it had been at daybreak to destroy the resistance of Russia, would never serve again. It was with but 90,000 that the Emperor reached his term at last, and entered that city which but a few weeks before he made certain would be the prize and the conclusion of the whole war.

There is a certain gloom, not only in the ac-

counts of Napoleon's own posture and face when Borodino had been won, but over the spirit of those numerous men who recount its story. There is no exaltation, but two haunting things which they all feel and which penetrate the prose of every eye-witness. These two things are the unearthly noise of the cannon massed as cannon never had been massed before within so packed a space, and thundering through so many hours as no cannonade had maintained since the first batteries had saved the Revolution at Valmy in the days when Napoleon was a boy.

That is the first thing.

And the second thing is what soldiers of long service rarely admit in their recitals—it is the presence of Death. You feel Death everywhere and his domination when you read, from the pens of those who saw the sight, his feast at Borodino.

But Napoleon watched half that night. He could not sleep. He sat awake, and his servant heard him once and again coughing to himself convulsively, *"Moscou! . . . Moscou!"*

X

UPON the eve of battle, as the darkness fell, certain officers who, during all the silent day, had been riding up and down, north and south, making what they could of the intrenched line before them and judging the positions for report, had returned to their bivouacs. Of these one, a certain major, was very fond of chess.

He had a little chess-board. It was his darling. He had ingeniously designed it to fold up in eight squares, so that it might fit into his pocket, and he had a box of little chess-men, equally portable; they were not held in their places by pins, for the little chess-board was of cardboard, not of wood. This major, when bivouac fire was lit, said to an officer who was a comrade of his (and who has left us the story), "Do you know how to play chess?" And the other said he did not. Then, said the major, a little disappointed (for he must have his game), "I will teach you." And gravely they sat down under the night by the light of that bivouac fire under the rising wind, and began their game. Hardly had the novice mastered the moves, and

hardly had some first dispositions in the pieces been made, when there came orders for those who had reconnoitered to bring in their reports to headquarters. And the novice at chess (but not at war) must remount and be off. It disappointed the major to be interrupted thus, for, as I say, he had a passion for chess. Fanette was his name. But, as his comrade rode away into the darkness, he carefully wrote down upon a slip of paper the position of the pieces, put that paper in his fob, put back the chess-men in their box, and folded up his little cardboard square.

There came all the terrible and glorious work of the succeeding day. There came, in a week, Moscow; then the fire, then the retreat; the cold, the famine, the huge disaster, the bridges of the Beresina, and the crumbling of a world. But four months later, in Berlin, this major sought out his comrade again, and, pulling out the little cardboard square and the chess-men, told him that now they could finish their game. There, preserved through the snows and the marshes, through the famine and the cannon smoke, and the fording of half-frozen rivers in the night, was the bit of paper showing how the game had stood. So these two Frenchmen sat down in Berlin and finished it.

Dessaix was a courageous man. He was on horseback when the shots were fired which marked the second phase of that great action. At his side was another man from the Franche Comté. This other man was riding a white horse. Dessaix, the general, and he looked down the slightly sloping plain beyond the captured positions, saw the Russians reforming upon their second line, watched the tangle of cavalry fighting far off upon the right; and shots, almost spent at such a range, fell near them as they watched. Now one such shot struck Dessaix's saddle; it struck the saddle-bag, and a flask of brandy concealed therein was broken and the liquor spilt. Dessaix was visibly moved. He turned angrily to that comrade and said: "It's that damned white horse of yours that got me that!" Dessaix regretted the brandy not a little. The man who tells us the story goes on to say: "It is true that my horse was white. I had it from General Bressand. Indeed, it was of a very brilliant white, and I must admit that mounts of this color are very commonly taken as targets by the enemy, particularly as they are often ridden by general officers, and, moreover, they are more easily distinguishable at a certain distance than horses of a quieter color."

There was a man in that great army who came from the Lake of Bourget, which is a beautiful, and was then a lonely piece of water shut in by the hills of Savoy. He was young, and he was wealthy, a captain; and being noble he took his name from the place, and Bourget was that name. He was that man who had brought his carriage all the way from Paris, following the army.

Being so rich, he had made a plan for the enjoyment of life. His plan was this. To follow the war until he could get his next promotion and be a major. He did not wish to leave the service as captain. He thought it better to take his retirement with the rank of major. He had been sitting his horse in the neighborhood of Dessaix and that other who tells the story when the flask of brandy had been broken (that little event which history is so careful to record). His horse, however, had been covered by part of the trench in the redoubt. As Dessaix and that other moved off, Bourget brought his horse up on to the level, and was for a moment exposed, and in that moment a ball struck him full in the forehead and he fell dead.

That evening, as they passed the spot again, they found his corpse quite naked; some marauder in the following darkness had stripped it.

Of a commonplace man and his wounds. There was a captain who, in his writing at least, was, and remains for history, a simple fellow. He takes rhetoric seriously. He tells us naïvely enough how much he loves glory. But he tells us other things in his recital which are very actual. First, he gets a flesh wound in the leg during the preliminary fighting of the 5th. But he can just walk, and the sergeant-major of his regiment, the 30th, binds it for him. Before dawn he takes the roll-call of his company; twenty-three men are missing. The sun rises, the first gun is fired, and the action begins. "As we climbed the slope" (the 30th was engaged in the attack upon the great redoubt) "it was a weary and difficult business, especially as the shells were bursting above us. . . . In spite of my wounded leg, I had to leap a little now and then, as had my men, to avoid a spent ball rolling." (I give it as he wrote it.) "Great gaps opened in the line. . . . I got through one of the embrasures of the battery just after a piece in front of us had been discharged. The Russian gunners met us with blows and handspikes and swabs, and we fought hand to hand. They were redoubtable adversaries."

Then he goes on to tell how the Russian reinforcements drove them out of the redoubt again, and he adds: "I have more than one campaign to my credit, but I never saw so bloody a business, nor have I found myself with soldiers as tenacious as the Russians are. I came out in a very lamentable condition. My shako had been shot off, and the skirts of my tunic had been torn away in the hand-to-hand fighting. I had bruises all over me. The flesh wound in my left leg began to hurt me horribly, and in a moment of respite it bled so that I fainted." He was taken back in this way to the ambulance by his men, and there he sees the general of his division with his jaw broken. The general shook hands with him. "The doctor came to me in my turn, put his little finger into the wound, and then probed it with his knife between the two bones. He said it was a good wound." This news seems to have pleased the captain. "He took out some splinters of bone." That captain we find next in hospital. "There were thousands of wounded, but very few of the 30th, for most of them *had stayed in the redoubt.* In my room there were twenty-seven officers of my regiment, of whom five had already had limbs amputated. Some lay on straw, some on the bare floor." His soldier servant found him in hospital.

"Luckily," he says, "I had 400 francs with me, but I had to pay four francs for one egg, and fifteen for a 3 lb. loaf."

Then, at the end of this brief recital, he adds what he learned of the fighting: "My lieutenant was killed, my sub-lieutenant dangerously wounded; my sergeant-major was killed, three of my sergeants, six corporals, fifty-seven men. There are only five men left unwounded of the whole company." In the following night seven of the wounded officers about him died. Finally, he tells us that his regiment, which counted 4,100 men when it set out, was now 300 strong. Three weeks later he hobbles out upon a crutch, and hobbles and hobbles till he gets to Moscow.

One must know little things of this sort to understand 1812.

XI

SOME say that the noise of Borodino, the volume of that enormous cannonade, was carried all the seventy miles and heard in Moscow itself: the violence of the gale which blew that day should account for this, we are told—and on the whole the story is to be believed.

Meanwhile, in the week that followed, the daily rumors of action grew louder, and by the Thursday the guns of the French advance and of the Russian rearguard that still protected the retreat were certainly heard: the head of the invasion was now very near, and out beyond the western suburbs the great road led immediately to an approaching army.

A spirit singularly national in character occupied the city during these last days. The alternations of panic and of rallying, of heroism and of despair, with which the capitals of Western Europe have awaited an enemy, found no place during this week in Moscow. Neither was there apparent that bewilderment and halting which have ruined nations before now when a blow has

been struck too near the heart. Neither (and this is most singular) was there any one ordered plan proceeding from authority and marshaling to a common purpose that innumerable populace, trained though it was to the immediate action of autocracy.

What happened was this. Great streams of carriages and men poured across the river and spread outward into the slightly rolling heights eastward of the city; day after day, the Thursday, the Friday, the Saturday of that week, they poured. It was the whole population of Moscow evacuating the town almost as an army would evacuate some surrendered citadel. Yet all this was not done upon any known scheme nor followed any regular command, nor even was it executed in one of those moments of spontaneous corporate action in which the South of Europe, not the North, excels.

This human mass poured outwards, away from the invasion, not precisely from fear (at least, for the most of them), certainly not because any soul had yet been told that Moscow would be abandoned by the army—that was kept secret until the very last hour, and after the last hour—but neighbor advising neighbor, a common instinct running through the crowd, a sense of refuge be-

yond, a Fabian determination upon the part of many which their Autocrat had so nobly and so simply expressed for them all—these were the spiritual things which urged the broad outpouring stream of men and wheels day after day.

In the event, those who please themselves (as the Russians in particular do) with a religious explanation of the world, may see in so general a purpose, acted upon so vaguely, yet so universally, the direct purpose of God; for what followed depended in some considerable degree upon this emptying of the city. I repeat: how far the motives were conscious, or in how many they were conscious, history is unable to determine, for the records, though numerous and personal, permit no such synthesis. But the aspect of the thing is there, very clear for history: a town much larger than towns were then, a sort of lake of men lying in that depression which holds Moscow, began emptying itself, and emptied itself in one flood for days along the eastward roads.

Among the few who remained in Moscow after the flight (they were beggars, some servants, some wounded, a handful of officials, an officer or two, and very rare families) was a man who has left a vivid record of the things he saw. He was, by his birth, and by his situation as a soldier, so placed

as to know, if any one could know it, what decision had been taken: whether the last defense of the town outside its walls was to be undertaken, or what.

He has left it upon record that he was himself, like everyone else in the whole city save two men, quite ignorant of the policy that had been determined. These two men were the Commander-in-chief of the Russian forces, the man who had fought Borodino, Kutusoff, and Rospotchine, the Governor of the city. They kept their counsel completely. They alone, then, were responsible, and they are still responsible to history, for whatever part their decision played in the liberation of their country.

Already by the Saturday evening, September 12th, this soldier of whom I speak, and whose testimony I am quoting, marked the desertion of the streets and the silence everywhere. With the Sunday morning he betook himself to the Kremlin to hear Mass in the Cathedral of the Assumption. Such few of his equals as had remained within the town made up the small but packed and crowded congregation for whom the Archbishop celebrated—amid an impression of disaster and of supplication which none present could forget during the remainder of their lives.

With the Monday morning, precisely a week after those first guns had opened upon the position of Borodino, this soldier went down to the western barriers of the town where comes in the road from Smolensk, and the avenue of the invasion; for he had heard, and all Moscow knew it, that the head of the national columns would be in the streets that day. It was as he sought this western barrier of the city, at the extremity of its disordered suburbs, nearly a mile from the Kremlin (so widely did the town, even in those days, extend) that he saw coming towards him the Commander-in-chief with his staff. He joined that group (for he was mounted) and followed it throughout its further adventures.

Kutusoff himself (huge, unwieldy, bearing outwardly no marks of that considerable skill in arms which posterity has underrated, but in his expression, for all the fatness of his face, showing strength and, above all, an impassible mood) spoke to no one, not even on trivial things. In the whispers which the officers about him exchanged, and which my witness heard, there was no knowledge or even hint of what was to come. They simply went forward, their general directing them, and beyond them for miles went what was left of the army. All Moscow was full of it as it

marched still eastward, and there it remains for us to-day, a hundred years after, the echoing noise of the rhythmic tread passing all morning, all noon, through the broad ways between the low deserted wooden houses of the suburbs, and past the central palaces of the town.

It was not until the head of this column had reached the eastern barrier and passed it that even the officers of the staff knew what was toward; they understood that Moscow was to be abandoned.

As that barrier was passed, there took place a brief question and reply, the words of which history would buy at any price if it could be certain of a true record. But no one heard those words save the two men between whom the few sentences were exchanged. Rospotchine sat his horse at the eastern barrier and awaited Kutusoff, and it was between these two that some inaudible plan or order passed. I am not disinclined to believe that this moment's low speech between the two concerned the burning of the city . . . but we shall never know.

The 70,000 or more—there may have been 80,000—marched on and on, out through the eastern barrier, still pursued, even at this moment when they found themselves abandoning the city.

The last of them had not filed out by the east when, at their heels, the first outriders of the French army reined up in the dust of the Smolensk barrier: it was the early afternoon of Monday, 14th September.

XII

WHEN the head of the Grand Army broke camp before dawn on Monday, the 14th of September, it was under a sky cold and still cloudy, but no longer threatening rain. The broadening day showed them the same monotony of slightly rolling land, of isolated patches of wood, of stubble newly reaped, of straw still standing unharvested, of marsh in the hollows, and of slight lifts of land following one beyond the other like lazy waves to the horizon. They saw what they had seen for now 700 miles of marching; save that in the last ten days, from just before the battle, the land had been a little more broken, a little more prodigal in turns of the road and new prospects than it had been in the first weeks across the dead, hopeless level of the plains.

Towards noon they came upon a little ridge of ground which in any other country but this would be negligible; here, after so interminable a march through such vague flatness, it almost seemed a hill. As they topped this rise the mounted men who rode before saw, some miles away, a long dull

line of doubtful white on the dull flat earth under the dull sky. This was Moscow.

Certain prisoners—perhaps peasants held for information rather than Russian soldiers recovered of their wounds—accompanied the vanguard. These, when that same dull line of white in its great length first showed upon the distant flat of the land, fell at once upon their knees and kissed the earth. This slight lift, which in such a country seemed a hill, was sacred to them, and had a ritual significance, because from it could first be perceived by any pilgrims from the west the Sacred City; and when the French officers asked of priests (who could inform them) why their prisoners had acted thus, they were told that the thing was religious.

The vanguard, and the first marching regiments after it, and the whole succeeding column of some 90,000 men, went on into that hardly perceptible depression, miles broad, and slightly tumbled as the land around it is, through which the Moskowa winds. It was not until the early afternoon that the very first of the mounted men who went before the army drew up between the huts of a broad, unfinished street at the barrier called the Barrier of Smolensk, through which the main road from the west entered the city. That road was

here, as throughout its length, no more than a broad ribbon of bare earth, unmetaled, and hardened by the passage of traffic alone.

There was no challenger at the gate, not even a watchman left. The small stone offices which flanked the entry upon either side were empty. No loiterer stood with his fellows in the street to see the foreigners come in; and though one could look for more than a mile uninterruptedly down the broad, unkempt way into the heart of the city, there was not a soul to be seen.

The complete silence of a great town has something shocking about it which very few men have experienced, and which those who have experienced it can never forget. Save upon the occasion of that entry into Moscow by the remaining troops of Napoleon no modern man has heard that unnatural silence. It may be that after some great pestilence of the Dark Ages men knew such things, and there must have been some day when, after the passage of the barbarian, the peasant timidly entered an Eastern city sacked by the Mongol, and found it thus desolate under the broad daylight. But for modern men and in modern times, this experience of Napoleon's vanguard hesitating first a moment at the barrier of

the city, then marching into its silence, has no parallel.

Of those who suffered this emotion some describe how the voice of one officer talking to another sounded too loud; others remember the irony of commonplace old soldiers, regimental officers who had entered half the capitals of Europe, and who simply denied that the town was empty, who called it a trick—for they were unused to miracles. Others (more careful to give an exact impression, I think) insist upon the effect of very rare figures seen here and there lurking in the shadows of doors; upon the effect of very rare sounds, the timid opening of a window or a chance knocking from within one house in a hundred, contrasting with the appalling silence which filled all the air of the place.

The Emperor would not enter the city. He hardly believed, even as the hours passed and as reports reached him amid his staff outside the boundaries, that Moscow was not still the nation: the noisy, populous heart which he had come so far to grasp. They brought him, as the afternoon wore on, a few chance wanderers picked up in the streets where they fled or hid. He would not say a word to them, nor learn anything from them. He awaited (and he remained oddly expectant for

hours) some deputation, some formal surrender of the town by its civilians, some civic acknowledgment. The afternoon was drawing towards its cold evening, and nothing of the sort came; nay, nothing of the sort could even be ferreted out and found, though now quite half the army had passed through into the empty streets of the place, and though cavalry at the gallop had hurriedly scoured great quarters of it.

When it was dark Napoleon, casting round, a little too late, for some shelter—fixed upon a ramshackle wooden cabin, one of the many hundreds which, whitewashed or left bare, marked the squalid fringe of the capital. He complained of the stench of the place, yet he would not leave it, having once settled in it for the night. He woke in the darkness and found it unendurable, and called to his man to burn some essence for his relief; but he would not pass the barrier before the next morning.

Within the city a young lieutenant of guns had found to his joy a house still inhabited, and that by a compatriot, a French merchant. He brought thither other officers, his companions; he lodged his men in the neighborhood; the guns were parked in the square outside. His host brought good wine from the cellar, and had good meat pre-

pared. They almost forgot the unnatural chill of the quite empty and quite silent miles of human buildings, sitting as they did at a meal the like of which they had not seen or hoped for since they had marched out of Roman, stocked, diversified Europe—three months before!

That supper lasted late. In the dead of the night, when many had already fallen asleep, covered with looted furs, their host came from the windows of the room with a cry. He said, "The Bourse is on fire!" "And what is that?" said the younger gunner. He also looked out, and saw a great flame at some distance reddening the sky. "Oh, sir!" said the French merchant, "it is a terrible disaster. It is an unimaginable loss! The place is more full of precious things than the Palais Royal itself in Paris!" He wrung his hands. He could hardly believe in such a catastrophe. That the Bourse should burn!

The young officer and his companions watched that distant burning, but it died down at last. The flames did not spread, the last hours of the night before the dawn were as dark as ever, save just over the spot where the embers of the great building smoldered.

XIII

THE Kremlin, of which people talk so much, is but a walled inclosure interior to another walled inclosure which formed the old city of Moscow. The walls of the latter, roughly painted in white, low, unimportant, stand in the central streets of the great town to-day, and preserve the memory of its ancient limits. The Kremlin, though no more than a knoll or very low bluff, steep upon the river side, but insignificant towards the land, yet affords from its battlements a fair view of Moscow even to-day, and that view was more comprehensive in the smaller Moscow of one hundred years ago. I say "in the smaller Moscow," though both in its numbers—it counted a third of a million—and in its extent (it was, with its suburbs, perhaps, ten miles round) the town was already enormous.

Napoleon, on the day following the first entry of his vanguard, passed through the streets with his staff, and prepared to enter the citadel. A high wind had begun to blow again from the north. The streets were dry. Clouds of unswept dust

whirled past, and the sound of the rising gale soon masked what had been for twenty-four hours the unnatural silence of a deserted, uninhabited town.

Under that gale the Emperor approached the little low walls of the old city with their curious *pignons,* and said, as he saw them, the words which every traveler must have used on coming first upon the insignificant appearance of a structure so famous. He said, "What walls!"

He passed through the double gate and entered the citadel, and the Court followed him. The Kremlin, with its palace, was to be his habitation and theirs until peace should be signed.

For Napoleon had no doubt yet of the issue. He had entered this city (at once his political and his military objective) with little more than one-fifth of the host which had crossed the frontier ten weeks before. However, his immediate army counted 100,000 even so: for now stragglers had come up, and certain wounded from the great battle of the previous week had been able to join him. Watching things as he did from within the regular ranks of his Guard, not a little deceived by the reports that reached him, and no longer careful to survey with his own eye all the details of his command, he did not apprehend the degree to which the mass of the forces had lost its discipline,

nor the extent of the pillage which had already begun.

Soldiers were everywhere, ferreting in every wealthy house for loot, making the fire in the Bourse (the chief storehouse of jewelry and of rich goods for sale) an excuse for the beginning of the bad business. The army had marched in on the Monday, the 14th of September. By mid-morning the next day, Tuesday, things were already going very ill with the order of the army.

There had already been, before the noon of that Tuesday, case after case of violence. Wagons loaded with furs and silks and wines were beginning to show upon the streets, driven back to the quarters of each unit, or to such houses as groups of the soldiers had chosen, or been ordered to, for billets. The anarchy was increasing with the morning; the relaxing of every bond after so disastrous, though triumphant, a march, and so many hardships borne, had already reached an extreme, when certain officers of the staff noted from the walls of the Kremlin that what they thought a chance fire had broken out in the northern quarters of the town, had spread—and, what was more, from three or four isolated points in the neighborhood of it other wisps of smoke were beginning to drive before the high wind. There

were orders sent out—particularly to such of the household troops as had been quartered outside the Kremlin and in the richer houses of the town.

By the early afternoon some disposition had been taken to meet what looked like a local disaster. Pumps were sought, and the sappers were dispatched to clear a zone round the outbreak of fire. The pumps were found to have been broken deliberately before the evacuation of the town, and the sappers had hardly begun their task before a very significant thing changed the judgment of those in the higher command who had watched the beginnings of the fire in the north.

They had thought it a local accident. They found it was something more: Moscow, all Moscow, was afire.

The details which convinced them were these: Far off to their left, to the east, fire appeared in quite another quarter. As they turned round to look southward, from the walls of the Kremlin a new sight startled them—another burst of smoke was rising and flying across the sky before the gale. Hardly was it noted when a general officer came riding up hurriedly along through the double gates of the citadel. In his wake certain soldiers brought with them a young man whom they had arrested.

The general officer shouted that the fellow had been caught red-handed setting fire to the house in which he and his staff were quartered. He ordered the execution of the man in a cruel fashion. The guard hesitated to obey. No one as yet had guessed the imminence of disaster.

The army was not only loosened, but jovial. It was half-friendly to the scamps who had remained in the city. The men had not grasped what the act of this young man might have been, though they were soon to know it. With difficulty, and only by the obedience of one man, was this general officer's order carried out. The young fellow was shot and fell, and they covered him with a cloak in the gates of the Kremlin.

Even as that short scene was acting it was apparent that the whole of the quarter immediately to the west of the citadel, and in particular the poor wooden huts of the Ghetto, would soon be one body of flame, and as the afternoon drew on other isolated jets of smoke appeared to the south beyond the river. Before nightfall, though the burning quarters had not yet joined hands, yet the dense columns of smoke (whirling furiously and almost flat before the tempest) already made a roof over the southern half of the citadel, and the Kremlin in its center, and the flying sparks

were catching continually new groups of buildings. As the night fell, the wind still rose and the magnitude of the business was apparent. Though the sky was clear, the night was moonless, and from early evening hours in which distant tongues of flame lit up the ring of the city to the north and to the east the rage of the burning grew until, by midnight, it seemed as though one-half of Moscow was aflame.

Far off in the countryside the national army of Kutusoff, in that same night, urging round to get astraddle of the southern road, marched, fifteen miles off, under the glare of that fire, and saw the whole world alive with Moscow burning. That army was modeling the fate of its country as a man models wax or clay in his hands. That long flanking march round south of Moscow was the beginning of a net. It already barred a French retreat by way of the south. Soon there would remain no way of escape for the French adventure but the retreat to the west.

They say that during this same night Napoleon watched, from the walls of the Palace, the roaring of the fire until the morning.

XIV

WITH the broadening light of the Wednesday morning (Wednesday, the 16th of September) the conflagration, though it was in truth increasing and spreading, seemed to dwindle. The great glare of the fire had gone with the darkness. The driving sheet of smoke was all by which men had to judge the extent of the flames, and now that it was day, the eye could still discover how large a part of the city, much the most of it, was still untouched. Moreover, the wind for the moment had stopped, and it looked in that forenoon of the Wednesday, as though the first effects of the fire might now be tamed and held in. But the anarchy in the ranks (save, perhaps, those of the Guard) was too considerable for action, even if it had been true that the fire was now declining.

During the hours of that night all Napoleon's forces in Moscow would have been at the mercy of one small unit of the enemy properly led; so complete was the confusion! Not one man in twenty was in arms. Nor did one in ten know

where the quarters of his regiment might be, or, if he knew it, by what road to find it, through the burning ruins and the shouting in those ruins.

But, even had the army been perfectly in hand, it would have been a false judgment that should have regarded as possible the repression of the fire. Continually, from point after point new signs of some deliberate plan to burn Moscow arose. Here it was a wooden palace with the rich colors of its upper stories painted after the old fashion of Moscow; there the metaled cupola of a church, which flamed. There, again—and most significant—a hospital for the wounded. None of these points was in touch with another. Each showed a separate and deliberate act, and still men were brought in who had been found fuse in hand, and they were shot; and sometimes the bodies of those who had been shot were hung hurriedly to the branches of the trees in public squares which the fire had not yet reached—as though "an example" could mean anything in that sacred capital, almost empty of its people, and certainly already doomed!

As for that first young man who had fallen to the order of the general officer when it had first been discovered, on the day before, that Moscow

was burning by intent, there was acted over his body a certain scene.

The man who had been shot was young and gentle-looking. As I have said, they covered his body with a cloak. Some hours later a woman had come up, and passed the great shrine of the portal. She had thrown herself upon the body, and made such gestures to the guard as moved them and allowed her to remain. A French soldier saw her thus, hours later again, upon this second day. She was sitting upon the ground with the dead man's head in her lap, stroking her hand over his face, and from time to time kissing it. She did not cry. After watching her in silence the soldier took her into the guard-room and gave her to drink. Either there was some one who could interpret for her, or she made herself understood in some way, but, at any rate, she gave them all to understand (these soldiers of the Revolution who had overthrown all the kings and half the priests, and who had buried and forgotten the religions!) that she would await the Third Day. On the Third Day (she said) he would come to life. And when she had said this, she sank down exhausted upon the bench of the guard-room and slept.

Meanwhile, with the approach of noon the fire,

twice repelled from the neighborhood of the Palace, had come near to the Kremlin walls, and Napoleon, hesitating, arguing with those who would have him go, bitterly consented at last. While the army fled at random, loaded with booty or (in the worst centers of the fire) half-naked and in terror, the Emperor and his marshals and his Guard filed out by the double gate, making for the river bank. Already burning brands were falling in the courtyard before the Palace. There were stores of powder there, and it was the fear of this, more perhaps than of the flames, which compelled those about him to withdraw Napoleon. In the Kremlin remained on duty through the peril, till he should return, two battalions.

The wind had now risen again with an increased violence. The houses that were actually burning were within a few yards of the walls. It was with no order, but in a sort of mixed torrent of men that the Emperor made towards the river, more or less at the head of such battalions of the Guard as accompanied him, but also in part surrounded by them.

As they went there ran in the kennels of the street an unusual drainage—sluggish, creeping serpents of stuff that looked at first like very muddy water, crusted with dust. But those who

had the misfortune to tread therein found it otherwise; for these twisting streams were streams of copper and of lead, melted from the burning of the great roofs near at hand. So they went forward towards the river, and along its bank. To the right of them the Ghetto was quite burned out, and they breathed an air full of smoke driving from the north.

There lies to the north of Moscow a palace in its gardens upon the St. Petersburg road. It was to this that the Emperor, with such of the Guard as surrounded him, proceeded. Their way led them along the river bank for nearly the whole of its trajectory. They crossed the road by which they had entered at the Dorogomilow barrier but two days before, and passed out into the suburbs.

But the removal proved extremely long. The varied accounts of it sufficiently prove the confusion and hesitation in which it had been undertaken.

As they went, night fell, and once more the enormity of the whole affair was displayed. For the night brought back again the aspect, the height, the terror of the flames—but these and their light and the noise of them were twice what they had been twenty-four hours before. Edging along the waterway, the farthest removed from

the violence of the caldron, the column which crept out surrounding the Emperor suffered strangely. Napoleon himself was caught now and again in tumbles of smoke and whirling sparks. His hands were burned and his hair, and there were burned patches upon the green coat he wore.

On the way to the suburban Palace of Petrowski, which he sought, there is a little lift in the road where it leaves the river bank, and, from the top of this, one could look backward and see what was now one great plain of fire, at least four miles in breadth. Of what went with such a sight, of all the evidence remaining to us of that night, read these two things.

First, of a man to whom were brought upon this height, nearly two miles from the city boundary, orders which he was to carry out next day. *He needed no lantern.* He read those written orders by the light of the vast distant fire below.

Second, one of those who were present all through that business, and who saw that march, and who watched and heard that fire, tells us with some little care what impression chiefly remained with him. He is speaking of the effect produced when already they had (like that man who read the orders by the light of the flames) proceeded some little way from the boundary of

the city. He bids us remember what sort of noise it is one hears at night in the mountains from torrents running near by through the stillness: the sedulous and ceaseless roar which at last is half forgotten in its loud monotony and forms a background to the smallest sounds. Such, he says, was the noise of all those miles of burning, under the wind which still blew furiously across the night, though the gale had now run for two days. Moscow roared.

XV

THOUGH the lift of land from the Moscowa is so slight, it was possible from the windows and from the gardens of that suburban palace to the north, where Napoleon had taken refuge from the great fire, to watch in a general fashion the progress of the disaster; and throughout the day which followed his flight the Emperor not only received continual messages of the efforts which Mortier (whom he had left in command of the city) was making to check the flames, but himself watched anxiously to see what signs there were of their sinking.

That watch brought no relief to his anxiety. The wind, which had shifted to the west and now blew less heartily, still rolled before it dense masses of smoke, and when darkness fell again the general line of light showing through the reek was still uninterrupted; and still from time to time new great columns or spouts of fire rushing upwards marked the new points on which the conflagration took hold one by one as it advanced. Moreover, precisely as during the past two days

there was apparent, even at that distance, the deliberate action of incendiaries; for from quarters which the progress of the general burning had not reached, single gusts of smoke would rise here and there, wax, lift, and drive in isolated streams before the wind of the daylight, or, when darkness had fallen, betray themselves by distant and equally isolated ribbons of flame.

With the third day, Friday, the 18th of September, though the fire still raged, Napoleon determined to re-enter the city. All the northern part between him and the walls of the Kremlin had been burned out. Something within the old city walls had been saved; of the fortress nearly everything. Though it might be hazardous for the Emperor to pick his way through ruined and charred streets already given up to pillage, yet by the river bank he could now regain the central palace of the city without danger. After all, it was but half an hour's ride. He regained it. The next morning, with a firmness of purpose which should be remembered, he paraded the Guard and reviewed them, while around them and to the south so much of the city still burned.

The signature of Napoleon continued dated from the suburb in which he had taken refuge, yet I will believe that upon this Friday he re-en-

tered the Kremlin for the purposes of the next morning's review; and this I believe through the exact evidence of a sergeant of his Guard, an eye-witness, and one upon whom the sequence of those days and their very hours was stamped for a life-time.

Those who would comprehend the full character of 1812, how it was the turning-point in the tide of the Revolution, the term of twenty years of war, must seize the effect which this endless, burned-out jumble, smoking to the horizon every way across the flat and over the hummocks of the Moscowa, had upon a man who had now, without interruption, entered what capitals he willed in Continental Europe, and won, not without good fortune, general action after general action, since first as a boy he had debouched from the lower Alps into the plains of Italy.

It would be a great folly to neglect the weight with which, in such a moment, the mere aspect of things bore upon his mind. He was at a strain. All general officers are always so at the end of a successful advance, at a great distance from their base, after the dwindling of effectives and before the enemy has been compelled to a final decision. Now, no general yet had made an advance in such numbers, unrolling such a vast length of communi-

cations from so distant a base into so untried a country, nor over such roads, nor through such depletion of subsistance. None yet had lost, in an advance still successful, so heavy a proportion of his effectives. Remember that of nearly half a million who, first and last, had crossed the Niemen above or below, barely 100,000 effectives were here with him in Moscow. And remember that what lay behind him was not a road, but a track—a broad earthen track with its makeshift trestle-bridges, often broken, and its vague fords over water-courses trampled into depths of mud. And that ribbon was not one hundred miles or two hundred miles, but seven hundred miles in length, to the last place where the peace ended. Remember that not a mile of it was safe from chance raids of mounted enemies. Remember that nearly every group of huts or barns on all that thin, interminable line was itself burned out, and, save by artifice, provisionless; and the belt of country to the left and right ravaged, deserted. Remember how, not seventy miles behind him, was the charnel-house of Borodino; ten days behind that again the wounded and the dead of Smolensk; and for a month of the way behind Smolensk again the doubtful confusion of wagons delayed, broken, spilled; and the bones of innumerable horses

whitening the approach to Vilna, Kovno, and the return to the Germanies.

Further, remember how that Russian army which had perpetually retreated from before him was still, as a military instrument, intact; how it had never been brought to a final decision—for Borodino was not that; and how, while he himself was thus hanging at the end of such a thread with but a fifth of his original command, the enemy, now pushed right back upon all his resources, was drawing sustenance from every avenue of the east and south: repose, recruits, and even hope.

It is bad history to forget the limited minds of men, and not to put into the balance of one's judgment their known capacities for fear, illusion, chance, and bewilderment. In such a circumstance this man, Napoleon, who as yet had never failed at all, but had proved an invincible spearhead to the Revolution in action, did not only calculate, he also felt. He not only enjoyed his marvelous capacity for estimating the material conditions of war, but also suffered those frailties of genius which, while it permits a man to foresee and to dare successfully, renders him open to presentiments, false dreads, false exaltations, and incalculable mists of the soul. It had been a shock

to his energy and to his initiative when, still suffering in body from the illness that had taken him before Borodino, he had found no one to meet him at the western barrier of the city, and entering it next day had found the whole place so strangely deserted. The confusion, if not in his plans, at any rate in their serenity, which he had then suffered, was now multiplied a thousandfold by the physical aspect of the burned and burning town.

The two French battalions left behind had, happily, saved the Kremlin. Some of the old city within the walls was also saved. But without, for more than a mile to the east and to the north and to the west, low broken ruins framing heaps of charred matter, smoked sullenly; and farther to the south the active fire still raged.

Here and there, marking the old alignment of the streets in their gaunt survival, stood the high shells of such few stone palaces as the city boasted, or—far more rare—great houses still intact which the fire had blackened but spared; but these remnants, standing up like broken pillars in a black plain, were not one-tenth of what had once been Moscow. Beyond the river, even as he reviewed his Guard, the flames still advanced in line and

spread. A fine drizzle which fell under the lessening wind did nothing to extinguish them.

This moral weight of something unexpected and terrible was, however, but a part, and not the largest part, of all that the week had meant. The army stores had gone. The town now burned was a town unprovisioned. It was not a place for quarters. Discipline was going; there are orders extant complaining that even officers of the Guard, in their haste and confusion, had come to pass the Emperor without saluting; the units were higgledy-piggledy, and the uniforms lost in a mass of sundry garments pillaged. Here was a regiment billeted over half a mile of ground under the few roofs left standing; there another regiment mixed hopelessly up with the units of some brigade with which it had not marched and with which it had no common command. The cavalry was three-quarters of it dismounted; and what was there left to haul the guns?

Napoleon had entered and made peace at Vienna, at Madrid, at Berlin—but this was Moscow.

Meanwhile, to cap it all, there had come news which might prove fatal. The poor remnants of his cavalry had lost touch with the enemy, and whither Kutusoff had withdrawn his men, what

road they blocked, from whence they might attack his interminable provisioning line, no one could tell him. Murat, his King of Naples, was groping in the dark with the horse; but for the first time since the advance had begun the scouting failed. Now, loss of touch with the enemy is the chief anxiety that can affect the commander of an army in movement.

XVI

FROM the review of his Guard, which Napoleon had passed upon the Saturday morning in the Kremlin, he returned to sleep in the Petrovski Palace to the north. On the Sunday he went back into the Kremlin for good, and re-established himself there.

The fire had died down. Moscow was all burned out. Five days it had fed that furnace. And what those five days were, with their shooting of incendiaries and their deliberate purpose of burning—certainly ordered by authority, and of the highest purpose in the story of Europe—one incident will suffice to show.

After that parade and review of the Guard before the Palace in the Kremlin, in the evening, just as the light fell, a few of the Grenadiers were hurriedly called together with a squadron of the Polish Lancers—some 200 men. They were marched off at full speed and at a moment's notice to the ends of the town to save, if it were possible, the Summer Palace of the Empress. News had come of its danger. It was dark night by the time

they reached the Palace—"as big as the Tuileries, it seemed, but built of wood and stuccoed to look like marble."

When the hurried detachment reached the place there were as yet no signs of flame; the great building stood black and empty against the night. Some few of the soldiers were even trusted to enter it. In less than a quarter of an hour after, while they were yet searching every corner, the deliberate sacrifice of men who had certainly been deputed for such work began. Fire broke out in a dozen places at once, each far removed from its neighbor. It appeared in the attics almost at the same moment as it appeared at the lower windows, and when water was sought it was found cut off, nor were there pumps available. Rospotchine had seen to that. Then, in the darkness, or rather by the glare of the new flames, one small figure, and another, and another could be dimly seen in succession far off in the grounds, creeping out from subways that had led to the basement.

The wind which, though recently fallen under the slight rain, had nourished all such fires for now close upon a week, rose again that midnight, and roared until past two in the morning; and once again eye-witnesses give that fearful picture of air too hot to breathe and of great burning

timbers flung by the wind and wounding men, and (most striking of all, I think) their memory of the brightness; how orders were read easily in the light of the fire and faces recognized as though it were daylight—yes, and men shot without lanterns, as they would have been shot under the sun. As the fire caught neighboring houses one man (it is on record) rushed in to find his son and found only a burned huddled something when the fire had fallen. He was a Swiss, and could speak French to the French soldiers.

One might tell nothing beyond the story of all that fire, for it is indeed the core and sole decision of that campaign; but now, by the Sunday, it was at last over, or at least there was nothing but smoldering throughout the six square miles and more, and against that plain one saw the Kremlin, but partly injured, standing up in the midst, with its violently shining domes and the dirty old low white wall of the inner city blackened and smudged.

Does it interest a modern reader to note what certain officers most sharply saw in all that desert of cinders? It was the vast accumulation of broken glass littering the lines that were still streets, though no longer inclosed by the depths of houses, but open like country roads to the sky.

The vast mass of broken glass, window-glasses, and looking-glasses, and drinking-glasses, and bottle-glasses; such an unusual sight! And it never stopped. There was street after street of it. All the streets. It was everywhere—for glass is fragile and yet almost indestructible, whereas wood and stuffs burn away and metal melts. Glass splits and flies under the strain of fire, and men flying from such scenes after pillage drink from a last glass and throw the glass bottle down. Anyhow, all that broken glass was what certain observant men remembered best in the flat and blackened desolation, with its rare, tall great houses still standing, lonely pillars in the waste whence all the rest had gone.

At last there came the first news, which was a sort of recovery. The remnants of the cavalry which had been riding out every way beyond the city had regained touch with Kutusoff. They had come upon him astraddle of the southern road, a couple of days out. That was on the Monday, the 21st of September. France had held Moscow for one week: but a week of fire.

On the Tuesday, 22nd September, while among the private soldiers there was some talk of a coming action against that enemy to the south, the old

activity of the Grand Army reappeared, a ghost of itself, but still moving.

Figures and tables were collected and sent to headquarters; there was an estimate made of the provisions to hand, and some attempt to reknit a discipline—how ineffective the future was to show. An establishment was drawn up of the effective forces. The detailed orders which the activity of Napoleon perpetually poured out were now renewed. Some arrangement began to appear in this chaos, and meanwhile the Emperor determined that it was now the moment "to sign peace in Moscow."

He groped for negotiations. He interviewed one of the remaining gentry, Jakowleff, to that effect. He found at least one man, the manager of the Foundling Hospital, who had some authority as an official, and had yet been by the nature of his duties compelled to keep in the town when all the rest deserted it. He made him one of many avenues of approach to the Czar Alexander. He promised safeguard through his lines for any letter to the Czar.

The necessity of some settlement so troubled Napoleon that he rose in the night to dictate its terms. He was beset by no desire (as yet) to evade a doom; he still felt himself a master; but

the tragic uselessness of his circumstance, the ominous delay, already worked in him. Himself a conqueror: but Moscow burned; the heart of Russia occupied: but stores doubtful; his men still many, and himself, as they, always hitherto undefeated and, indeed, not thinking defeat conceivable: yet foolishly and exasperatingly hobbled by such ruins at the end of such a line of communications. . . . And what a country! What flats and marshes between them and Europe, for how many days and days! No true roads, and hardly any horses left. He would make peace—but as a conqueror: he would negotiate for peace; he would make it a good peace. . . . He would permit Alexander to take part in the reconstruction of Europe.

His valet notes that the great number of carrion crows wheeling in the autumn sky, perching on the ridge tiles of the Kremlin, were perpetually marked by Napoleon.

On the Wednesday, 23rd September, the Emperor went out for the first time with his staff and the officers of his household; there was present also a small escort of Polish Lancers, and they all went out together to take some view of what the fire, now dead, had done. He had taken off

that gray cape which in the slight rain of the last few days he had worn.

The Emperor rode out in uniform, in the green coat with its red collar; very plain, no gold lace upon it; the famous hat and the cockade upon his head, and the Star of the Legion of Honor upon his left breast.

These things were noticed about the horses: that the Emperor rode a quiet little Polish cob, his generals great thoroughbreds, and the escort those scarecrows which were all that was left to the rank and file of the army's poor remnant of cavalry.

Napoleon rode the streets all round about at a foot's pace, and examined all the blackened welter, and then went back at evening to await the reply of Alexander.

Wednesday went, and Thursday, but there came no reply. Day after day Napoleon rode out upon his little cob (which, by the way, was white) with some few generals, and with his escort of perhaps fifty Lancers. There was nothing doing. No answer came from Alexander.

The drizzle had ceased; the weather was clear again, autumnal and pleasing, with a white frost now and then in the early morning, and later a sort of fruitful sky over the sterility of the ashes,

and over that army which was still an army, but had already taken on grotesque fashions as of Asia. There was a dead halt of the mind as of the body in the conqueror's force, and every one waited for the news that never came. Far off, across the southern road, Murat watched the enemy.

XVII

THE discipline to which an armed force must be subject, if it is to remain an armed force at all, is not the object of its existence, nor even the chief character by which it should be recognized. It is but a means to an end; and that end is (1) automatic obedience and action in the mass; (2) a strict co-ordination between the leaders.

The external manifestations of discipline differ profoundly according to the society in which the armed force has been formed and (if one may use the word) the spiritual side of its nature. It is on this account that you will have a force as universally successful as the Prussian army of the late 'sixties ridiculed (before its successes!) by rivals or enemies for the absurdity of its strictness on parade. It is on this account also that you will have in the earlier history of the revolutionary wars not only ridicule but contempt expressed by the older professional soldiers of the aristocracies and the kings for the rabble which, first by superior numbers, but later by every other form

of superiority, established the new order of affairs in Europe.

Men, in this year 1812, had long ceased to ridicule or to despise the curious tone of social equality which ran through the Napoleonic as through the revolutionary armies: the slouch on the march which could be transformed so quickly and so terribly into a very different pace at the charge; the straggling columns in which the falling out was so rare and which outmarched every opponent except the Spaniard; the shouting, the superficial confusion, which rarely failed to resolve themselves into an exact synchrony, of strategy over whole countrysides, of tactics upon the field. The novel aspect of Napoleon's great commands and the interior revolution which that external aspect both symbolized and produced were now known, well enough, to be not only compatible with victory, but hitherto inseparable from it.

Nevertheless, the disarray of the hundred thousand that lingered in Moscow under that clear autumn weather impressed with a sense, not only of strangeness, but of ill-ease, men who knew very well how to distinguish between the real and the apparent in the strength of a body of soldiers.

Something had weakened in these forces, through the strain of the advance and through

the perpetual losses, the distant, ill-controlled foraging parties to the right and to the left, the very largeness of the host that had been gathered together, the lack of provision and of repose. That cohesion by which alone even the most elastic body can live had half dissolved during the unrestrained pillage which preceded, accompanied, and followed the Great Fire.

The walls of the Kremlin, hiding Napoleon from his men, made a sort of symbol: his physical presence, which counted for so much as a bond, was removed; and we have many contemporary pictures of the dissolution in habit, in hierarchical respect, and in strictness even upon essentials which those weeks of waiting produced.

The scattered regiments divided between the few remaining buildings over all those miles of ash were hardly to be recognized by common uniforms. They had begun to wear the chance luxury or warmth of their loot, and as like as not one would meet a man of one's company unrecognizable in some great Asian fur, booted in the knee-high leather of the Russian serf, bearded, of course, and, as like as not, forgetting the salute.

There was no exercise save for the household troops; there was little or no review of kit or arms, no assembly of cavalry, now for the greater

part dismounted, no daily service of the guns. And every memoir of the time is full of a sort of uneasy lounging at ease, in the starved enjoyment of things most disparate and worthless. Skins and jewels and gold and silver vessels, great stores of wine, and the rest, come into every record; yet men fought for the insufficient meat, passed days without a meal, and wandered loose among the ruins, seeking indifferently necessaries which they lacked and the maddest of superfluities which they hoped, in their lack of all calculation, to carry back with them (after the peace which all hourly expected) for their enrichment.

There is one particularly vivid scene which concerns the most solid nucleus of that army, the Guard itself, and which gives sharply the outline of all this.

An officer with the rank of captain, a man from the nobility of the old régime, tells the story. He had occasion to pass into the Kremlin upon some duty or other, and there at the gate he found the Grenadiers of the Guard; great Russian cloaks covered them, and by way of belts they had tied cashmere shawls about their middles. They had, set out before them, great vases, half as high as a man, looted from some palace and filled with preserves. They had, ranged also before them, a

great regiment of bottles; and when a man would drink he would take up one of these and break it at the neck to save the trouble of uncorking. Some of this Guard whom he saw thus making holiday, even on duty as sentinels, still wore the high bearskin which distinguished their corps; others had Russian caps upon their heads, and most of them were not a little drunk. Some were fooling with the huge wooden spoons wherewith the preserves were ladled out, making believe to present arms with these. The captain came right up to them and would have gone past them, but one called out to him that he must first have a word with the "officer in command." The time had passed for any reprimand; still more for any report. Our officer-witness would have hurried by, but they blocked his way laughing, and took him into the recess which served for guard-room, where one somewhat drunker than the rest, sitting before a great fire of planks torn from the neighboring buildings, saluted him as comrade, and prescribed a grotesque ceremonial. They bade him drink "to the Emperor of China"; he drank good-naturedly enough and went his way.

Meanwhile, in all this increasing disorder, rare commands came from headquarters, each more impossible to execute than the last: horses were to be

bought "from the neighboring peasantry"; details of the provisions to be requisitioned were duly set out; and in a country not only bitterly hostile but half deserted and at the same time gradually recovering some hope of release, Napoleon—shut up in the Palace away from his men, certainly not grasping all the weight of his disaster (for this it was growing to be)—continued to expect for his army such regular provisions in the neighborhood of Moscow as he might have found in Italy or in the Germanies.

Desperate raids were organized upon marches two, three, five days distant. One gunner tells how he rode with a small body of men close on a hundred miles—and yet there was never any certainty of sufficiency in the mere necessaries, in the forage for the few horses remaining or in food for the men.

Thus things stood in Moscow; and away to the south, on the flank of Moscow, Murat with his mounted men was watching, and occasionally skirmishing against, the main and increasing Russian force under Kutusoff; he also at his wits' end to feed the horse of which he had been for now so many famous years the famous leader.

Meanwhile, as September ended and no reply came, nor the hint of any conciliation from his

rival, Napoleon revolved (with a lack of precision new to him) one unfeasible plan after another. He came at last to determine upon a step which was, in spite of all formalities to save the word, a suing for peace.

XVIII

I HAVE spoken more than once of the broken nights which the Emperor's health, the magnitude of his last adventure, and an uncalculating anxiety which had not left him since he had crossed the borders of Lithuania, imposed upon him as he there lay in Moscow unachieving: trapped!

The nights were no longer of repose, but of foreboding; some, of tortured doubt. The night of Friday, the 2nd of October, was the last of these. It was a night of bowed decision.

He had passed the greater part of it in angry scenes or, at the best, fruitless arguments. Upon the morning of the Saturday he summoned his marshals and told them that he had determined upon a policy.

The man who so minutely describes this transition was an enemy and something of a rhetorician; but he was an eye-witness, and therefore merits attention: also, his account is confirmed by another.

The plan was this: To leave Moscow by the

northern road, and make for St. Petersburg. Murat, drawing gradually back after the army, would screen it from the attack of the enemy's force to the south. Not for the first time by a hundred was Napoleon, during that short interview with his colleagues, the strongest in determination, the most vital in will, of the group that stood around him in one room upon some eve of action. But his *judgment* was on that night (for the first time!) so wholly at fault that these lesser comrades of his were easily his masters in the debate.

None would hear of such a march, and Davout, an obstinate man, upon whom the Emperor must have depended to secure the retreat, spoke for them all, as they watched around in silence, and with no responding enthusiasm, the energy with which their chief pressed his sudden and quite impracticable plan. For Napoleon's plan was a plan upon the map: unreal.

Davout spoke of the nature of the road, of which the rough general maps said nothing, but of which, now they had all tasted Russia, they were sure enough; and of which Napoleon should also have been sure had he still been in full control of that wide and immediate vision which had so nearly made him the master of Europe.

All those leagues of marching, over a road that a few peasants could cut at the bridges, a road through fens and narrow wood defiles, a wintering way in a state of which they knew nothing: worse, perhaps, than the mere beaten broad earth-track which had brought them here, and which was so ruined after rain and so makeshift at the passage of every stream: such a road would never carry the hundred thousand—and what of supply? How could communications be stretched to link up round this elbow and this farther extension of innumerable miles.

And as they so marched farther into the North, that winter of whose advent no one could fix the date (but which must come earlier and be more terrible than the winters of the West) would be hanging upon their flanks like another army; when it fell upon them it would destroy them more surely than the doubling of Kutusoff's could have done. "In fine," said his bold and saner adviser, "the thing is a retreat, though you call it the conquest of the second capital of Russia; and if we must retreat we will retreat by the road we know, through the magazines we have established and upon the shortest, the existing, line of communications."

It remained to seek once more, and that more

definitely than in the first informal parleys, for peace. Napoleon would send Caulaincourt. But Caulaincourt refused. "Alexander," he said (and said rightly), "will never treat so long as a French army is on Russia soil."

"Then," said Napoleon, "I shall send Lauriston."

If a choice of pleader had to be made that choice was wise.

Here was a man whom Napoleon had known from boyhood, and who had had so singular a balance of qualities as to serve him equally in diplomacy and in the field. He had accomplished Napoleon's work at the Court of Denmark, he had brought to London the preliminaries of the Peace of Amiens; he had shone at Wagram, he had known and sounded the Russian Court fully during his presence there in the last months of peace before the invasion. A gunner, like his master; of the same age; completely loyal and of a sound and careful judgment (Scotch in descent, and by his family name Law—the grandson of the financier's brother) Lauriston would, if any man could, bring back some basis for peace.

Upon Monday, 5th October, he was sent—after one last and private interview with the Emperor, of which no exact account can be trusted,

but in which the necessity for some immediate settlement was certainly the gist of his orders. He set out by the southern road with something of the solemnity of an ambassador to seek the camp of Kutusoff, and through that army to reach, if he could, the ear of Alexander, its sovereign.

XIX

THAT October was like the October of its centenary. The sky then repeated itself after a hundred years. Shortening, sunny days mellow with haze, white frosts in the mornings, a calm air—all these were remembered by the men who paced and lounged and slept in Moscow awaiting some news of peace.

Meanwhile none came.

No work was set the army. Discipline, already so deeply impaired, was not at all restored. There was nothing of arms save those occasional, distant, and often cruel, foraging raids. Not a word from the Russian Court nor any fruit of Lauriston's mission announced, nor even the sound of cannon.

A man does well, when he is considering as a whole this decisive year in the history of Europe, to think of those middle days of October, 1812, as something of slack water.

It is a metaphor I have used before. Let me use it again. We know the way in which a tide pours up at the spring, filling a river mouth and coming up to the very edges of the harbor. That

was the advance. Then there comes, not the ebb at once, but an appearance in the harbor like a lake. The water does not move at all save for a little swaying, and the whole mass does not seem so much to hesitate as to repose. That is the picture of Moscow between the mission of Lauriston and the decisive rumor of cannon which determined the retreat.

Not only did the army thus lie stagnant under a misty sun, warm in the afternoon (but rising and setting through cold mists), but morally as well, in its disposition for war, the host was halted. The conditions were those of an armistice; and the body which Napoleon had thrust out a day or two's march to the southwards (to stand opposite Kutusoff and to watch the main army of the enemy) enjoyed, formally at least, a fortnight of repose.

I say "formally," because one element (to be of dreadful significance in a few weeks) disturbed so simple and so Western a plan. That element was the Cossack. The swarms of their cavalry—which the enemy could maintain to be "irregular," and could pretend to think of as being without effect—perpetually stung the communications: not only that main line of communications which led from the West and from Europe to Moscow

(the road by which the army had marched), but also that shorter line perpendicular to it and running southwards which attached Murat's corps of observation to the Emperor in the Kremlin. There was daily conflict and daily loss, and already, though the French were living in expectation of an immediate peace, the word "Cossack" had come to be ritual in the French service, and was a synonym for something uncontrolled: not to be matched in any of the regular fighting of the West; infinite in number, striking with lances in a charge and wheeling off again; not to be worn down; not to be pursued.

Upon the front itself Kutusoff followed a plan which was perfectly successful. Knowing better than any other man how thoroughly his master had resolved to sign no peace and even to hold no parley until the enemy was off the soil of Russia, he yet continually played with Murat, turning the armistice into something like friendship, giving his enemy every useless advantage he might require of comfort or position, and entertaining him perpetually with this show of an approaching reconciliation.

But though Murat, there at the front, was deceived as to the enemy's mind and as to the politics of the moment, that soldier was not deceived as to

his situation in arms. He, a cavalryman, the most furious of Napoleon's charging captains, and sent, indeed, thus southward because he could so well command the last weak units of the Grand Army's horse, saw his mounts, perpetually dwindling, reduced to starving upon such straw as was pulled from the thatch of the houses. They seemed at last hardly a cavalry at all. And Murat was as clear on the issue as Davout had been. It must be peace or retreat—and that quickly.

One day, the cloudless sky which governed all that fortnight becoming overcast, the Emperor noticed something. It soon passed; the sky grew clear again. The warm sun shone. But during the little interval of dullness a few flakes of snow had fallen.

It was but ten days since he had sent Lauriston south. The strange thing came thus in a short exception of a few hours: a short, an almost imperceptible interlude of that calm autumn weather. The noons were warm before and after, and before and after it the sky was hazily clear. But the portent had come; it had been seen; the flakes had fallen. And though they had melted in a moment, the vision of them remained in the mind of Napoleon. It was the little message of winter

sent forward; the whisper of its name—and there was no news and no answer. The enemy was still dumb.

I say, a fortnight had passed since Lauriston had been sent southward to parley with the Russian army and its monarch.

It was upon a Tuesday that that slight snow had just menaced the air and vanished. Some days later—upon the Sunday—Napoleon had summoned to his court of the Kremlin certain regiments—that *corps d'armée* which Ney commanded, the IIIrd. They were drawn up in the court of the Kremlin. The first words of command had not yet been given. The officers were standing in groups waiting for the parade. Napoleon had come, but had not yet issued an order—when there went from mouth to mouth first a rumor, then confirmation of it, and at last a certitude that the thing was true. The noise of cannon had been heard to the southward by Vyankovo. That was Alexander's answer, and his only one. Without notice the armistice had been ended, and at once, and at Russian hands.

At first no one would speak to the Emperor and tell him this; but at last Duroc went up and told him; and Napoleon, understanding all it meant,

changed for a moment, then was master of himself again, and held the review. But from that moment he knew that the expected peace—his certitude—was gone. He must retreat.

It was Sunday, the 18th of October.

XX

THE IIIrd Army Corps was drawn up in the court of the Kremlin for the review. Of that great body which had crossed the frontier under Ney's command, 10,000 alone remained to answer the roll-call, now, here, to-day, in Moscow.

Precisely four months had passed, and such had been the wastage. Even that number was only possible through the calling to the ranks of men but lately or hardly cured of wounds, and of men prematurely drawn from hospital. But the pride of the army, never yet broken, still steeped in a constant tradition of victory and of splendor, had inspired in what was still (after the Guard) the best commanded body, a zeal for even the useless externals of parade; and the lines over which the Emperor looked from his horse that day presented something—some memory at least—of what he had seen on so many parades in the court-yards of so many palaces from the Tuileries to Madrid, and from Dresden to this last turning-point in the East.

I have told how, before the review began, the

rumor of a sound of cannon to the south had spread, had grown certain, and had reached the Emperor's ears; and I have said that on hearing this news his anxiety was manifest; that nevertheless he proceeded with the business of the day. The dwindled units (a few companies stood for a regiment—of a whole German division of 12,000 but 800 were before him among the rest) he carefully surveyed, noting the condition of their arms and proud of their bearing. With his mind full of the abrupt revolution which that sound of cannon meant, he yet proceeded to allot those rewards and to deliver that encouragement which formed his custom upon these occasions.

There was room enough for rewards! There was no clog on promotion in such days!—in such and such an episode of Borodino, two-thirds of a regiment's officers had fallen; in such and such a skirmish in defense of convoys, the Cossacks had wiped out an escort! And the crosses, and the decorations, the titles of the Imperial Court, the pensions and the rewards from the Treasury—he could be lavish enough with these.

But that relic of the IIIrd Corps stood before him as a symbol of dreadful losses which had left him, after a victorious advance, with less than a quarter of his men; and though no one

there yet pictured the agony to come, every man, and in particular the Emperor, must have been asking himself—What fraction of this small fraction would reach the frontier, if, or when, a retreat should be accomplished?

There was something hurried about the scene, for all its order, and a sort of impatience in the rapidity with which Napoleon passed from one unit to another.

For all this haste, the review was not yet ended when there rode in through the great covered gate of the Kremlin an aide-de-camp of Murat's, a young man, a noble, Berenger by name; he brought with him breathless the full story of what had happened to the south. Here is the story confused in its detail, contradictory as all such hurried galloping messages are, but big with danger.

Not only was the armistice broken, not only had the Russian reply to Lauriston come at last in the shape of cannon-fire, but the King of Naples' command had been thrown topsy-turvy by the suddenness and weight of the attack, and had but just escaped complete destruction. In the night bodies of the enemy under Beningsen had crossed the River Nara (which was, as it were, the frontier between the opposing lines that had watched each

R. Moscowa
Petrovski Palace
Moscow
Borodino
Moshaisk
Podolsk
M
Voronovo
M
Vyankovo
Borovsk
Tarutino
R. Nara
Malayaroslavetz
Reference:-
Kutusoff's Army.
Bodies crossing R. Nara and attacking Murat
French Corps of observation.
MM. Murat's Command, attacked & defeated at Viankovo, Oct: 17-18.
0
10
20
30
English Miles

other during the armistice fifty miles away), and with the morning the Russian guns had opened suddenly on the front and left flank of Murat's command. It was the sound of these guns, heard by intervening troops, which had first sent the rumor through the city. With a rapidity against which none had provided (for all believed that the armistice would end in peace) a further attack had developed in front of the French after this first one upon their flank; and when, seeing at last the peril in which he lay, Murat felt for his communications to the north, he found that Platoff had already cut him off five miles away—astraddle of the road! Murat was surrounded—by every rule he should have gone down utterly before this sudden pressure upon every side; but Kutusoff with the main body of the enemy had not pressed hard enough; the carabineers (Murat himself urging them) had broken through the force that blocked the retreat; the Poles of Poniatowski, fighting desperately, had taken and beaten off the pressure upon the left flank. So at last—with great losses, but not destroyed—the French observation force had forced its way back and saved what could be saved. But the baggage was gone, twelve guns were lost, a mass of munitions, and

close on 4,000 men; and Murat himself was wounded.

This was the news the horseman brought Napoleon just as the review ended, and this was the meaning of that rumor of cannon which had preceded the advent of Berenger.

The review was ended, the company officers were marching off their files, when Napoleon summoned the colonels round him, and briefly gave them his orders. They would leave Moscow upon the morrow. The whole army must be prepared instantly to depart.

It was under these circumstances that Ney's IIIrd Army Corps was the first to learn, even before the Guard, the decision, the necessity for retreat; and it was such an accident that permitted it, perhaps, to be the best-equipped of the various forces that filed out of the city twenty-four hours later by the southern gate.

The retreat was to be made not directly at first by the road along which the army had advanced from Borodino, but to the south, and this for reasons which I will describe when I come to the general conditions under which the disaster developed.

XXI

THAT night there lay upon a mass of those rich furs which were the plentiful spoils of the city a group of the sergeants of the Guard. I quote their particular experience, because we have it from an eye-witness, and can judge from his account the suddenness with which the last preparations were made.

These men were smoking at their ease round a great bowl of punch, which they had mixed in a huge silver vessel of the loot. The pale flames of the burning spirit lit them as they joked together and talked of France and of old wounds, and of victories remembered and long glorious. Beyond the doors in the next room the private soldiers of their company were gathered. Most of them slept; it was silent enough. Suddenly came all at once the shuffling of feet, the swearing, the rattling of metal, the striking of tinder boxes, and all the movement and noise of a barrack-room unwillingly awakened.

The sergeants also rose, and there came in a colleague of theirs who was on duty for the week.

He brought the order. They must be ready to march at dawn. It was not until far later—in the afternoon—that this particular detachment of the Guard got past the gates and out, but there was no more sleep for them that night, and with the break of day the streets outside filled with peasants and peddlers crowding in to buy or filch what the soldiers could not take with them: hour after hour each company saw for itself what provision it could make for the march. Hand-carts were seized and loaded. A confusion of wagons harnessed to such horses as the encumbered artillery had not commandeered followed now a battalion, now a company; with no regular apportionment of vehicles to units, but each company, battalion, regiment enjoying much or little transport as luck or opportunity provided. They gathered thus confusedly in that sudden rising up to go.

It was Monday, the 19th of October, 1812.

Here you could see, already in column, and passing down one of the broad uneven streets between the charred ruins of the houses, all that was left of a whole regiment, with perhaps one wagon at the most for carrying some wretched remnant of food; there a far smaller body guarded an ample provision of carts and barrows, sufficient,

one would think, to provide for a month's march. Again, there still remained, and were to be seen here and there, the private carriages which a few of the wealthier officers had retained in their service, or which were being dragged along filled with a cargo of mixed loot, barrels of wine, cases of sugar, more rarely (for this was lacking) sacks of grain; or the rich silks and skins (of which every observer of the sack of the city notes the profusion) bulged from their windows.

The great mass of 100,000 men—organized, yet presenting an external aspect of great disorder, clothed fantastically in remnants of uniform and oddments of every kind of civilian clothing, carrying sometimes in person besides their kit (with that lack of prevision which marked the ranks) heavy incongruous loads of looted wealth, gold and silver vessels, vestments, wines—all this streamed southward through the city, across the bridges and towards the old Kaluga barrier under the sun of that Monday and its autumn afternoon.

As the Guard tramped past the Kremlin the men heard that a whole division had been left within its walls with orders to destroy the fortress, and, when they had thus accomplished the vengeance of Napoleon, to follow on in the rear of the army. Mortier commanded them; and

high in the air above the churches and the palaces they could see workmen sawing at the base of that great gilded cross, the cross of Ivan, which the Emperor had ordered to be cut down and taken away for a trophy. The work was difficult and long, and round the carpenters, as they labored upon their perch, wheeled flocks of crows filling the air with their prophecies.

The day was brilliant. The sky less hazy than it had been, the air as warm or warmer than in the week just passed; and it was upon a good surface (one of those very broad tracks of beaten earth which pass in Russia for roads), that the great mass poured southward as the afternoon declined. But broad as was the way the hundred thousand engaged upon one column grievously encumbered it, as did the now disproportionate mass of artillery; and there is a curious picture remaining for us of Napoleon pushing his way through that crowd amid the shouting of his escort, to reach the head of the line before night should fall.

He was leading his men straight for Kutusoff, for the field of Murat's late reverse: as will be seen very shortly, he was doing so with a deliberate intention of proclaiming his presence and of challenging, as it were, the enemy to meet him

upon the ground of their success. But this apparently unsoldierly display of his meaning, this apparently straightforward blow aimed directly at the main Russian body, was but part of a plan well conceived. Napoleon had designed to deceive his opponents, to pass their camp and trick them, and thus to begin unmolested the first stages of the Retreat. His plan just—and only just—failed. What that plan was, and what were the general circumstances under which the return of the army and its entry into disaster began, I will describe in my next chapter.

Meanwhile we must imagine the hundred thousand still intact (Napoleon and his escort leading them), all in one column, filling that Monday afternoon and evening with the noise and confusion of their advance down the old road to Kaluga.

They so pressed forward until darkness had fallen, and many of the units still proceeded southward far into the night before they received the order to bivouac.

XXII

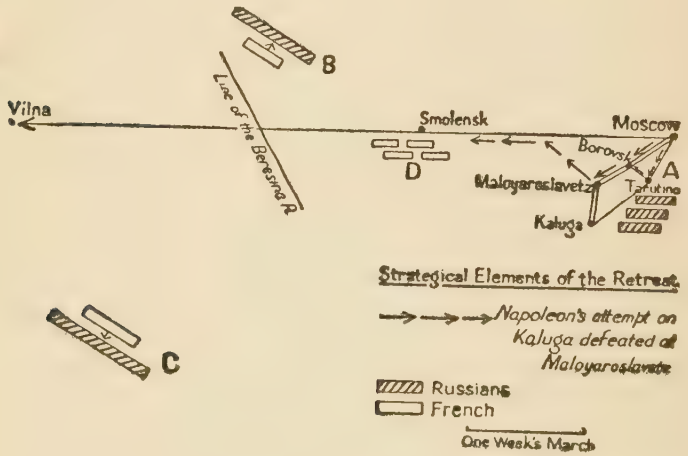
I HAVE hitherto done no more than present so far as I could certain pictures of the advance; its weather, its landscape, and its human incidents. To this method I propose to keep in that description of the Great Retreat which I am now about to attempt; but the latter would be incomprehensible, unless the reader had in his mind the simplest elements of that strategy upon which the French retreat depended. To those elements, therefore (in their slightest form), I turn.

Napoleon had led his hundred thousand out of Moscow, not by the main western road which had formed the line of his advance, but by the southern road towards Kaluga. Why had he done this?

Further, it was his business to bring that hundred thousand back into friendly territory, or at any rate to some point where he could winter in safety, and in so doing to pick up and save, with as little loss as possible, the other corps which lay behind him guarding his communications and

fending off his foes. What were those corps, what their position, and what their numbers?

Last, we must ask how many men Kutusoff now could oppose with his main army, and what bodies of the foe other than this main army threatened the Retreat?



In order to answer these three questions, we must first consider this little sketch in which is roughly presented the strategical position.

Murat, covering on the south the stay of Napoleon's army in Moscow, had "sounded" the Russian force, still intact, there watching and had found it strong. His cavalry had been checked.

The main town of this district was Kaluga.

Two roads led to it from Moscow, meeting like the two sides of an olive: one to the east, one to the west. The eastern was called the "old" road, the western the "new" one.

It will be seen that the main army of the Russians under Kutusoff at A, the army which had just defeated Murat, lay at Tarutino, south and a trifle west of Moscow, cutting off any advance upon Kaluga by the *old* road. In Kaluga were now gathered great stores, which, could Napoleon seize them, would be of high value to him in the Retreat. If Napoleon could reach those stores he would, first of all, badly hamper Kutusoff in his further provisionment, and make it difficult for that general to pursue the French forces as they drew back westward. He would, secondly, replenish his own convoys. Thirdly, he would be well *ahead* of the main Russian army—farther on to the west, and with a couple of days' start. Fourthly, he would be interfering with that perpetual recruitment of men which Kutusoff was receiving from the south. Fifthly, and most important (as we shall see in a moment), *he would have got in between Kutusoff and another Russian army far off to the west,* at C, which was hurrying up to effect a junction.

For all these reasons it was Napoleon's policy

to reach Kaluga as the first point in the Retreat, and only when he had reached Kaluga to make for Smolensk.

This passing through Kaluga meant, of course, a detour. Napoleon might have made a shorter retreat by a more direct line had he neglected the excursion to Kaluga altogether, and made at once due west for Smolensk; but as things stood this detour was the game to play. It was worth Napoleon's while to waste the march down south to Kaluga and northwest again to Smolensk, that he might seize the stores, deprive the enemy of them, and henceforward keep himself between the enemy at A, and the force coming up to help the enemy from C.

Moreover, he at first thought himself in sufficient force to strike this blow. When Kutusoff had evacuated Moscow he was at the head of no more than 70,000 men. Had his command remained of such a size, Napoleon would have attacked him at once with superior numbers, as the most effective way of clearing the road to Kaluga. But Kutusoff's command had by this time—the end of the third week in October—swollen to very different dimensions. Recruits and irregulars had joined him in so considerable a force that he already outnumbered his enemy. If Napoleon

commanded a bare 100,000, including many recently discharged from hospital and hardly fit to march, Kutusoff now commanded at Tarutino at least 110,000 well equipped, well rested, and well provisioned. Napoleon, therefore, in spite of that appearance of marching direct upon Kutusoff with which I have dealt, really intended, if possible, on hearing of his enemy's increased numbers, to slip by him and to reach Kaluga without a battle. The maneuver by which he made this attempt, and the manner in which he failed to achieve it, I will relate in a moment.

So much, then, for the situation at the origin of the Retreat, and in the neighborhood of Moscow.

At the other end of the line two positions must be grasped. The first I have marked B. Here a French force, now dwindled to 17,000 men, at first under the command of Oudinot, then under that of St. Cyr (after Oudinot had been wounded), stood in flank of the line of Napoleon's Retreat, guarding it from a much larger Russian opposing force. St. Cyr's force at B was a sort of mask parrying off the Russian force concentrating in front of it, and threatening the road back to Vilna. But here also, following the general rule of all this disastrous latter half of the war, every

day diminished by wastage the French troops and swelled the corresponding forces of their opponents; and opposite St. Cyr's 17,000 you had, at the moment when the Retreat began, something like 40,000 under Wittgenstein. It was inevitable that with such disparity of forces the French flanking corps should be pushed back southward.

The second point at the western end of the line, which we must note, is that of Brest-Litovsk (C). Here Schwarzenberg commanded some 34,000 men with which it was his business to prevent any attack upon Napoleon's Retreat that might come from the south.

The danger of such an attack had seemed but slight when the preparations of the campaign were being made, for such forces as Russia had in the south were occupied in the Turkish War. But Turkey had made peace. A week before Borodino, a fortnight before the occupation of Moscow, Tshitshagov had begun marching northward from Bucharest. A month before Napoleon had marched out of Moscow this general had joined another Russian force, Tourmassov's; the two between them commanded 64,000 men, and, as they advanced, Schwarzenberg, with his inferior forces, little more than half the enemy's, was compelled to retreat before him. He crossed the Bug; he lay

at Brest and its neighborhood; he might at any moment, as the Russian southern army still pressed northward, be compelled to fall yet farther back. As a fact, within a week of the first contact, Schwarzenberg did so fall back; and, by the time Napoleon had evacuated Moscow, he had been compelled to fall back yet farther.

It is evident from the above that Napoleon in his retreat to Vilna would be marching through a gap between two Russian armies, which stood upon either side of the gate between him and safety; that each of these armies was far larger than the forces opposed to it; and that the gate might be closed before Napoleon should reach it.

To prevent this catastrophe he could only rely (apart from the men stretched along his whole line of communications) upon one concentrated body of 37,000 men at Smolensk (D) under Victor. It was possible that Victor, by helping one *or* the other of the two inferior French forces holding the gate at B and C, might keep that gate open just long enough to let the remnant of the Grand Army pass through to Vilna, to safety and to rest.

One last element of the situation must be grasped in this brief survey. The "gate" of which I have spoken was barred by a natural obstacle, the course of the Beresina River. Even if

the "gate" were not completely closed, even if the northern and the southern Russian forces in the west should not join in time to close the trap, Tshitshagov alone with his great body might delay the Retreat at this obstacle of the Beresina; with Kutusoff presumably following close behind Napoleon, with Wittgenstein pressing presumably quite close upon the north, that delay at the river crossing would mean the destruction of whatever French forces reached the Beresina, and the capture of Napoleon himself.

As to this last point, I beg my readers to remember that in every crisis of the Retreat, and particularly at the Beresina, to intercept Napoleon in person and to prevent his return to Europe was a matter of real political importance and therefore a legitimate strategical object. It is important to remember this, because we might otherwise wonder why history makes such a case of the fact that the wretched fragments of the Grand Army *did* manage to cross the Beresina and to drag their last frozen hundreds to the frontier. Not once or twice, but particularly at the Beresina, the destruction of Napoleon himself seemed certain; and had Russia achieved it, had he not survived to fight and lose Leipsic and Waterloo, the story of Europe would be a different thing. The

prestige of the reaction would have been a Russian prestige, and a thousand other consequences would have followed the sudden extinction of such a name at the full height of its glory, with no memories of a lingering defense or of a final failure at the end of the desperate and impossible rally called the Hundred Days.

It was Russia, indeed, that defeated Napoleon; what followed 1812 was but an epilogue. None the less, had the defeat been complete in 1812, had not the western epilogue followed, Russia would have meant more during the nineteenth century, and the west of Europe much less. But, as the fate of Europe willed it, the Emperor crossed the Beresina and was spared to fight his last fights beyond the Rhine.

XXIII

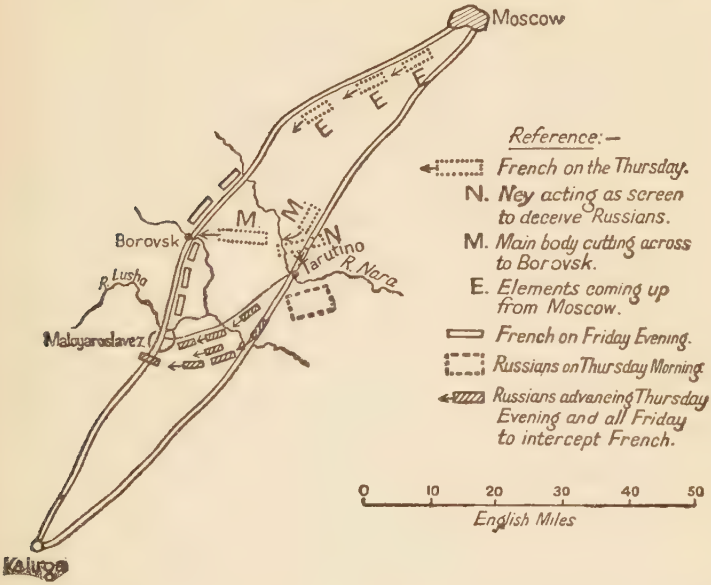
ON Saturday, 24th October, at the end of the week the beginning of which had seen the evacuation of Moscow, was fought an odd, partial, indecisive action, which those who are accurate and curious in their observation of history may properly regard as the exact material point where turned the story of the Grand Army, the fortunes of Napoleon, the tide of war.

Here it was, for the first time, that the Emperor's great instrument of conquest was checked, and, after hesitation, retired from before the enemy. The action was fought for the possession of a town called Maloyaroslavetz, and bears its name.

Let me first put as plainly as I can the conditions under which the struggle took place, even though such a description involve some repetition.

I described in my last pages for what reasons Napoleon had determined to make an "elbow" at the beginning of his retreat, and to work back to Smolensk, not by the direct road, but round southward by Kaluga. The occupation of Ka-

luga was, then, his immediate business. I have further told how two roads, one the old road, and the other the new, united Kaluga and Moscow —the old road to the east, the new road to the



west. They diverge already within the boundaries of Moscow, and leave the city by two separate gates. These two roads, the old and the new, inclose a narrow irregular lozenge, or "olive," which, at its widest, stretches about twenty miles from one track to the other.

About halfway to Kaluga along the old road lay the main army of Kutusoff, in its camp at Tarutino. Napoleon had come out from Moscow by that *old* road without concealing his advance—nay, deliberately advertising it—with the intention of deceiving Kutusoff into believing that he intended a direct attack upon Tarutino. But, as a fact, his intention was the opposite of this. He meant, at some little distance before reaching Tarutino, to turn suddenly to the right across the width of the "lozenge," to get on to the *new* road, and once upon that line to make by it for Kaluga. In this way, if he could maintain Kutusoff under the deception that he was still advancing by the old road, Kutusoff would be waiting for him uselessly, while Napoleon was marching right past him to the west.

To take a rough parallel from the better-known map of this country: Salisbury (which is about as far from London as Kaluga is from Moscow) may be reached by marching through Guildford and Winchester, or by marching through Staines, Basingstoke, and Andover. The distance between the two roads is not nearly as great as in the Russian case, for roads are common here, rare in Russia; further, our roads are good, theirs were mere tracks; again, we have crossroads every-

where fit for cannon, they had not. But the parallel must serve. In this comparison Kutusoff would be lying at Farnham; Napoleon, advancing upon him till close upon Guildford (and leaving a force there to screen his movement), intends to cut across and strike the other road where it passes Sandhurst, then drawing up his screen behind him as he advances, to march on to Basingstoke: to arrive at that town, perhaps to have *passed* it, before Kutusoff, at Farnham, should have discovered what he was at. He would have gained a clear day, and have got round his enemy. He would be in Salisbury first, with its stores and its provisionment.

All the *first* part of this Napoleon did. In the second part he failed.

The army had marched out of Moscow, as we have seen, on the Monday, the 19th. On Thursday, the 22nd (Ney forming the screen a day's march in front of Kutusoff), the army turned sharp off to the right, and on that same day its vanguard had reached the town of Borovsk, which, upon the new road, corresponds to the position of Tarutino upon the old road, though a little farther forward; it is rather more than halfway from Moscow to Kaluga by that highway. From Tarutino to

Borovsk was a little over twenty miles by cross-roads and just under twenty as the crow flies.

On the morning of that same Thursday Mortier, with his division of the Young Guard, had exploded the mines under the Kremlin, by design or accident had failed wholly to ruin it, and had marched out to join the main army.

Here, then, we have, by the night of Thursday, the 22nd, not quite half of Napoleon's forces already on the new road; the head of it (mainly composed of Italians under Eugène, with Delzon's cavalry) had already been at Borovsk for some hours. The tail of it, under Ney (which, during the daylight, had acted as a screen to prevent Kutusoff guessing what was going on, and to make him think that the main French army was still halting in his neighborhood), was on its way that night between the two roads. By daylight on Friday, the 23rd, Napoleon might expect the great bulk of his force to be in order, marching through Borovsk, and making right for Kaluga, four days' march away.

There had been a few hours of rain. This sharp turn to the right was a march across country over plow and heath. The horses were insufficient in number and poor in condition. There was, therefore, some little delay, but not so much as to af-

fect the issue. What materially affected the issue was something very different—Kutusoff had got wind of the movement in time.

His cavalry had appreciated during the 22nd what was toward, and on the evening of that day, when, as we have seen, the bulk of Napoleon's force was either on or approaching the new road and the town of Borovsk, he ordered his whole army to break camp and to march westward to intercept Napoleon.

I have said that the town of Borovsk may be counted about four days' march from Kaluga. One long day's march ahead (rather more, that is, than a quarter of the distance) the road is cut by a ravine curiously deep and abrupt for so flat a country and forming the bed of the River Lusha. Upon the farther or Kaluga side of that stream, built upon something like an escarpment (it is so steep), stands the town of Maloyaroslavetz. Thither it was, to intercept the passage of the French, or at least to detain them upon such an obstacle, that Kutusoff directed his command.

On Friday, the 23rd, long before dawn, Eugène, having previously sent forward Delzon's cavalry, had marched down the Kaluga road from Borovsk towards Maloyaroslavetz. The broken bridge was mended and held; a couple of French bat-

talions occupied the town on the farther steep bank, driving out the few Cossacks who alone defended it. It seemed as though the passage of the river obstacle was cleared, and the advance of the Emperor upon Kaluga unencumbered. But Kutusoff, unknown to Napoleon, was on the way, and his cavalry was, on that Friday evening, almost within striking distance of the town, the bridge, and the ravine of Maloyaroslavetz.

These details which I have enumerated are lacking in the picturesque. They are essential to a comprehension of what passed in that small obscure market-town of the Russians which is and has since that moment been a pylon in the war-race of Napoleon.

At nine o'clock on the Saturday, Napoleon (who was himself at Borovsk with the mass of his army before him upon the road) rode southward down that road for some five miles. It was a clear and a beautiful morning, full of autumn; and everything was silent. Such sounds as accompany the marching of troops (for the most part too distant to be heard) alone broke the stillness. Having ridden these five miles, he ordered food and was eating this luncheon of his by the roadside when, about eleven o'clock —an enormous surprise—the continued thud of

cannon-fire not eight miles away through the quiet air and to the southward interrupted him.

For the second time—and after precisely a week's interval—that sound announced to him the failure of his plan: the march on Kaluga had been intercepted.

Napoleon mounted at once, went forward at speed with his companions, and somewhat after noon—but before it was yet one o'clock—saw from the northern heights above the Lusha what had happened at the crossing of the river.

XXIV

"DO you remember, my companions, that fatal field whereon a term was set to the conquest of the world, whereon twenty years of victory were wiped away and there shook from its base the high monument of our glory?"

In some such words one of the principal witnesses to the actions and to the Retreat of 1812 recalls Maloyaroslavetz.

That battle stood for those who saw it or who heard its consequences what I have called it, "the turning of the tide."

Yet, for the better instruction of historians and for the better understanding of war, let it be noted that Maloyaroslavetz was no defeat. It was a victory won against heavy odds, a superb presentment of military value and of common courage, a glorious tradition for the young Italian troops who bore the weight of the fury. Tactically it was a sharp success. The battle secured the bridge across the Lusha; it secured the town which commanded that bridge upon the farther side. It thrust back the main Russian army which had

come in to intercept Napoleon, it did all that the commanders had been told or asked or expected to do—and yet it is the breaking point of the campaign.

So true is it that war must be measured in terms of policy and that tactical successes are but the episodes of strategy, and battles but details of campaigns.

I have told how Napoleon, hearing the distant sound of guns in the late morning, had ridden forward and, just after noon, had looked from the northern heights across the Lusha to the little market town upon the bank beyond.

At the moment of his arrival the struggle for the ravine below him was violently engaged. Some hours before the two French battalions (which formed the advance guard and had occupied the town and its bridge) had been driven out by the first arrivals from the Russian side. All morning the attempt had been made to recover the houses and the bridge. They had not yet been permanently recovered.

The swing of the fighting (which was of a very desperate sort, firing at close quarters in the streets of the town and often a struggle hand to hand) went with the hurrying up, now of fresh numbers from the north whence the Grand Army

advanced, now of new bodies coming in from the east, whence the main Russian army of Kutusoff was marching. And as each new reinforcement reached one or the other head of the opposing movements, the Russians or their enemies alternately occupied the bridge and the town. With each such alternation a greater confusion of wounded and of dead blocked the broad, uneven ways between the wooden houses and the space round the church.

Noon passed. Neither party had definitely driven forth the other, though by the early afternoon very considerable bodies were engaged.

It was Eugène's Italian command, of course, the vanguard of the army, which had all this work to do, or at least the greater part of it. Delzon's French cavalry, early engaged, had failed, and Delzon himself had fallen with a bullet in his head; his brother, come up to drag him out of fire, fell also, and the two lay dead in one place. But Eugène's men, the young Italians who followed (by conscription) the Viceroy of Italy, displayed as the afternoon developed such qualities as a veteran force might have failed to display and as all the army (when they heard of the feat) envied and admired. The church, held continuously throughout the day by a small body under Guille-

minot, formed, like some miniature fortress, a pivot. From it each successful forward charge of the Russians down the street to the bridge was checked or imperiled: from it each counter-success of their enemies was supported by French muskets through the loopholes. But the dying was done by the Italians.

The 15th Division in particular, quite young men or boys from beyond the Alps, who had not yet suffered fire, took the steep slope of the town in the fourth assault (and at a terrible loss). They were broken, but they returned with the Viceroy's own Guard, and in that fifth effort the crest beyond the houses was at last permanently mastered. Peraldi, with a regiment of his own (of light infantry, also from Italy), even pursued, in a vain attempt to capture the Russian guns that were covering the retreat. He failed in this, but his famous action shows in what a temper that last successful charge was made up the steep streets of Maloyaroslavetz.

The town was held, the bridge secure, and all the steep of the bank down to the river was in the hands of the Grand Army; but, dead or grievously wounded, 4,000 and more men (the most of them Italians) encumbered the trampled

ways or lay heaped at the doors and windows of the houses.

It was still broad daylight. From the edge of the plateau which they had reached, the troops saw the great mass of Kutusoff's men formed in deep, dark lines against a ring of distant woods. A rearguard screened their movements. It was imagined, rightly, that the Russians, having failed to hold the bridge against so inferior a force—no more than the head of Napoleon's advancing army—would decide to retreat. But that retreat would be along the Kaluga road. The great Russian host, quite unshaken, in spite of the heavy losses of that day, still stood astraddle of the only way that led to the stores and to the provisions of Kaluga. It could defend point after point where the road led through the defiles of the great woods. It could offer battle again and perhaps yet once again before Kaluga should be reached, if Kaluga could be reached at all. And though the next order must come, of course, from Napoleon, even the company officers, I think (such as survived and saw from the height south of the town and across the level of the plateau the wide, ordered mass of the enemy between them and the woods), must have known that the advance upon Kaluga had failed.

Battles are won, and yet campaigns lost.

The Lusha bridge was held, but held in vain; and when next day the news came that the fight had proved useless and that the host would turn back to the Smolensk road, that dull and heavy news was, after all, inevitable. The most brilliant, the most hazardous, and, upon its one field alone, the most *successful* military thing done in all the long story of that march through the Russian plains, was quite thrown away; and the victory which, under other strategical conditions, might have meant a certain issue, here at this late season, at the opening of a retreat and effected by an isolated force for the possession of a passage not usable, meant exactly what a defeat would have meant—all that could be said of that brilliant action was that it had saved the Retreat from demoralization and had permitted an orderly retirement.

After all this triumph of the Italian recruits over the bridge and up the hill of the town, there was nothing left but to return and to make as quickly as might be for the Smolensk road. Yet it was not until many hours of the next day had passed that Napoleon accepted the downward path and, for the first time since he had worn a sword, withdrew forever.

XXV

IT was the morning after Maloyaroslavetz: Sunday, the 25th of October.

The sun had just risen, and was shining dully through haze when Napoleon and a handful of his great ones, already mounted and heavily cloaked, were waiting near the huts in which they had passed the night after the battle. It was one of those landscapes which are repeated thousand upon thousand throughout the whole of the Russian plains. A sandy pasturage slightly rolling; the broad, hardly-beaten track, with its varied traces of cart wheels; in the distance a line of forest, and, nearer by, before the Emperor and a little to his right, a separate wood standing, I say, like a large island in a sea of wold. As they thus sat their horses in the cold morning and began to take the road, they perceived coming out of this wood, by small, fairly regular bodies, a group of cavalry. The distance—some thousand yards or more, perhaps—also perhaps the slight mist of the early hours, rendered it difficult to distinguish

these mounted men. Caulaincourt first made them out.

"Cossacks, Sire," he said.

Napoleon, with shorter sight, three years older, and in far worse health, strained his eyes acutely towards those distant trees, yellow with autumn. He had not yet seized the methods or audacity of that irregular cavalry. Troops were for him either regular or negligible, nor could he conceive a sort of haphazard penetration thus into the midst of his own body—and of ground "occupied" by his forces.

"It is not possible," he said.

Those distant mounted men began none the less to raise unfamiliar cries. They were advancing, and as they galloped there was no more time to lose. Napoleon had just added—

"What can they be but our men?" when Rapp seized his bridle and turned the Conqueror's horse round briskly. Berthier agreed: it was plain now. "They are Cossacks, Sire; go quickly!" And thus, ordered by a subordinate in the haste of the moment, Napoleon after a word or two more made off with his generals about him, and Rapp, though suffering from a wound, put himself at the head of the squadron that

served for escort, and rode back against the Cossacks to take the shock.

That covering squadron was thrown into extreme disorder. The little hairy men, hairy-capped, hairy-clothed, bandy-legged, all one with their little hairy horses, were on them like driving hail, and the lances were everywhere. One struck Rapp's horse. It fell upon him. Then, as was always their tactic, the Cossacks wheeled about and made for another French body, one with guns, which they saw at some distance. This also they overthrew and seized the pieces and the wagons; but Bessières came up just in time with certain cavalry of the Guard, charged them, and recovered the cannon.

As for Rapp, they got him into the saddle again, with plenty of blood on him, but able to ride, and his wounded horse limping back towards the huts, and again they found Napoleon.

That was the opening of the day in which Napoleon made up his mind.

We have many descriptions of the anxiety or hesitation or bitterness in which he passed so many hours. To give way was a new thing for him; to suffer the will of the enemy was a thing to him so long unknown that he had forgotten it.

I say we have many accounts of the way in which he passed those hours, most of them too highly colored (one representing him with his head in his hands at a table, mournfully listening to, and not accepting, one policy after another). None are sufficient. All probably are tinged with a desire for effect. But there rises from the combination of them all a clear perception of two things. It was a long and a difficult struggle in the mind of that Soldier before he accepted what, as a soldier, he could but perceive to be blank necessity. He held the bridge; he held the town and the slope beyond; his enemy was in retreat over the plateau to the south—but the road to Kaluga went across that plateau, and was closed to him.

I cannot conceive what purpose historians have in debating the moment and its strategy. Even had the Grand Army been able to concentrate at the passage of the Lusha within, say, twenty-four hours; even had it attempted yet another action a little farther to the south within forty-eight hours: *"Qu'en fût-il avenu?"*—as Malherbe says of those who will not face the death of the Beloved.

How could an inferior force and one with no possibilities of recruitment force a road passing through defile after defile of forest against a superior force perpetually open to recruitment?

How could that inferior force hope to find intact (even if it should fight its way through, diminished and bled) the stores of Kaluga? And what reason had Napoleon to reach Kaluga at all, save either by surprise to separate Kutusoff from his colleague to the west (and surprise had failed), or to find a moment of refreshment upon his retreat, and to use stores which the enemy, if he fell back through Kaluga, was now free to burn?

No. The determination to go back even from that river bank whence could be perceived the field of the Italian success, was not a determination taken as might be taken one out of many choices. It was the grinding thing which now and then appears in the lives of heroes, and of which the Greeks were in such dread that they made it the mistress of the gods. It was necessity.

The man was bound to go. He was in the presence of unalterable things—and he turned back, making as quickly as he could for the main Smolensk road.

Had not Kutusoff got wind of Napoleon's movement; had Napoleon tricked Kutusoff's force and passed it, would there have been a very different issue? But Kutusoff had moved just in time, and though Eugène's advanced corps had so splendidly daggered the enemy out of Maloyaro-

slavetz hand-to-hand (giving, as I think, an original to the modern tradition of Italian arms), yet all that success was now strategically useless. The Russians were across the Kaluga road.

Napoleon, then, turned back; and this little market town upon the short steep above the Lusha River was the limit of all his mighty endeavor.

Henceforward he was to follow that road which we all follow at last under one name or another, and which ends in the supreme adventure of the soul at death. But he was not to be consoled by any sufficient knowledge of his own ultimate success, nor by any vision of what the France which he refounded was to be.

By the afternoon of that 25th of October even the advance guard had turned its face northward; save for a corps of observation under Davout (two divisions on the road facing south, with two more in Maloyaroslavetz itself, mainly cavalry who were to follow after sunset), the army was on the ebb for Europe and repose. These goals it did not achieve. It died upon the way.

XXVI

WHENEVER men are passionate in the discussion of the past they will receive and establish falsehood upon either side of that discussion.

The Retreat from Moscow gave rise to a legend very firmly established in the European mind for a century, that the great and undefeated enemy of the Emperor was the Cold. Every picture of that disaster is a picture of blood-tracks in the snow, and of dull, frozen horizons, and of bare wastes sterile with Cold. The modern critic (whose chief offense it is that he does not understand tradition) has pretended to reverse this permanent and established legend; and more than one writer (concerned, it would seem, only to belittle what is great, with no power himself to perceive or to enkindle) makes out that return to Europe to have been commonplace enough for weather. Such contradictions suit our times and their jaded itch for paradox.

Now the truth is here what the truth is in nearly every legend, in nearly every great tradi-

tion. Such legends represent whatever grew rooted in the minds of those who actually suffered, saw, and did the thing; but contemporary suffering and doing invariably falsifies the numerical proportion of things. Hence it is easy for the critic, following day by day the changes of that winter, to show how much of the efforts in which the last of the Grand Army dissolved were free from that chief terror which loomed up so very high in the recollection of the men that really met it—the Cold. Nevertheless the legend is the truth and its criticism is the falsehood. The Cold *was* the abominable thing: the dreadful enemy against which men could not fight and which destroyed them.

The winter of 1812 came later than do most winters of Central Russia. One may even say that there was a sort of benignity in the air, lasting far longer than, in the short autumn of those plains, Napoleon had right to hope for. The season, I say, was late, propitiously as it seemed. But the gods mocked. When winter came it came not only with a suddenness and a severity, but also in such a juncture that all the remaining lifetime of one who survived the snow was haunted by it. It was at the end of the first week in November, just as the Retreat began to be pressed, confused,

and most perilous, that the Cold struck. In what fashion it struck, and after what a sequence of days, I shall now proceed to describe.

When after Maloyaroslavetz the now ninety thousand or less turned backward and northward to make for the Smolensk road, they still had above and around them the lovely October weather which had blessed all the last days in Moscow and the initial vain attempt to slip past Kutusoff and carry the stores of Kaluga. My readers will remember how the hazy and quiet skies of that week had been broken by the one bad day of rain —a day that coincided with the Western movement by which Napoleon had slipped from the eastern to the western road, in the hope of eluding the vigilance of the Russian cavalry.

Now that the Retreat had begun in earnest, this fair weather continued, one might almost say, to *ensnare* the host. At any rate, it made possible the haste of the withdrawal. The sharp early mornings were hazy, as were the evenings, in which great suns set through brume upon the wooded horizons of those empty, slightly rolling leagues of land. One day after another such suns set slowly in the west, to which the column was hurrying.

It was a march morally anxious, but not yet pressed, with the enemy hovering near, and now and then striking home; his main force some twenty miles away. We must imagine the Grand Army, in broad, irregular, parallel belts, darkening the open land for miles and miles: men, wagons, and guns, a convoy not yet exhausted, arms still borne by the most part, the as yet undiminished host came once more to the battlefield of Borodino. They had fought there seven weeks before.

Three years on, in the route after Waterloo, the last army of Napoleon was to see a similar sight. The broken men, pouring in the moonlight down the Charleroi road, stumbled in panic past the naked corpses of Quatre-Bras. So here at Borodino, in full daylight, the miles of straggling broad columns hurried past, and contemporaries have recorded for us the odd silence in which all this great number of men pressed forward to be rid of that sight (and worse) with its memories: for the forty thousand dead lay many of them unburied and still packed in heaps —after nearly two months.

The fighting had been desperately close; there was the great redoubt, pestiferous; there were the southern fieldworks outlined in what was left of

horses, of saddles, of sodden uniforms, and of what once were men. The metal had suffered least, but the swords also were rusted. Some sabers still, they say, lay clenched in the bones of the hands that had held them when Murat charged; the leather thong that holds the sword was caught corrupted about the corrupted wrist.

By the evening of the fourth day of the Retreat all that battlefield was passed, and wonderfully eased were those driven men to have passed it!

That evening also was an evening of fine weather still enduring, fresh but clear. The bivouacs were possible enough.

Three days later came the first bad pressure. A whole section of the army was cut off by the pursuers. It was compelled to fight its way back; and did so at last with loss but success. The French dignified that day by the name of a general action, and even, in the case of some regiments, I think, recorded that action upon the colors. But not this feat of self-preservation, nor even the now perpetual anxiety which the enemy had planted in the mind of Napoleon and of his men, nor anything that had as yet come to them in their backward march to the West, was comparable to that which fell in the night between November 5 and 6: not the road, which the rearguard

(now under the command of Grenet) found strewn with an odd trail of books, of vessels of gold and of silver, of pictures, of arms and all that was shed from the loot; not the surface which, traversed already for months by the upward march to Moscow and the innumerable train, was becoming with every mile more and more detestable; not the ominous serving out of horse flesh to the Guard and the threat of short rations; not even the snow which had already begun to fall abundantly, in advance of what was coming, and to impede the marching of the soldiers—none of these things, I say, counted, compared with what befell upon the 5th after darkness had fallen. This was the Cold.

The bivouacs were formed upon the snow, still tolerable enough. The rearguard stood outside the defile through the great forest of Viasma, protecting the passage of the army. A thick fog descended. The sentries felt for the first time no longer discomfort, even of that acute and gnawing sort which seems to those who read of it under civilian conditions to be a hell; what they felt as the night advanced was a thing new to them, and perfectly intolerable to humankind—a thing no Westerner among them had yet known—the

winter advancing from out of Asia, from the Frozen Steppes.

It came through the thick fog like something sentient. It had come out of the east, striding. It had caught them up. In the silence, in the wrapping of dense cloud (so dense that the bivouac fires on the snow were not to be seen one from another) Cold caught the whole world, and killed men where they lay.

Men talk of having breathed that night an air itself freezing, and of having felt the rasp of that air, so that at last they could only breathe through the coverings of the mouth.

When, after such hours of agony and of death's beginnings, the fog, a little thinner, was dully mixed with a first light of morning, the intensity of that pain was lifted. The march of the next day (passing from fog to further driving snow in a high wind), though lamentable enough to men now disarmed by the hundred and the thousand, and to stragglers falling out continually as they stumbled through the drifts, is recorded to have been warmer. The first blow of that enemy had spent itself, being too hard; but the enemy had come, and though I have described him with violence, I have not exaggerated his power. With greater pressure and less, now lifting his hand, now

striking hard again, he felled the men of the Grand Army by packets and by groups until—more than the Cossack and much more than the formed bodies of Russians (who did not sufficiently press the Retreat)—Cold had destroyed the command of Napoleon altogether.

XXVII

IT was thus, then, that just outside Viasma, during the night of November 5-6, the Great Cold first struck the army. With that blow its dissolution was begun.

But though the suffering and the death which now began to fall upon it were, in precisely one month, to destroy it altogether, one week was still passed in some hope of rally. The fearful loss in men, the abandonment of arms, the appalling wastage of every kind, the increasing accumulation of a mere defenseless herd mixed in with the soldiery, did not in those first days destroy the expectation of some issue. The reason of this expectation or hope was that, somewhat more than a hundred miles in front of them, the ruins of Smolensk covered some body of stores, and promised a moment of recuperation and of repose. What disappointment they were there to find the Grand Army did not yet know.

Already the order of the march was so confused, the necessity for dispersion upon either side of the road in the search for food and fuel

was so considerable, that it is impossible to give within the short space of these pages any clear picture of the harried convergence upon that goal. To describe it I must follow the adventures of one body, the rearguard, with but a mention now and again of certain other bodies and of their experience.

The rearguard had been intrusted after the army left Viasma—that is, the second week of November—to Ney and his IIIrd Army Corps.

From that moment and during the last month of the disaster Ney did all.

It was he who beat off, fighting all day and every day, the pressure of the pursuit; who later, when that rearguard was cut off, managed just barely to escape capture and to bring round some fragment of his command past the flank of the intercepting enemy; and who, by a personal example of energy and of sacrifice, established himself forever in the history of war. So great was his soldierly achievement that, in spite of his vacillation and folly during the last days of the Empire, his errors before Quatre-Bras, and his waste of the cavalry at Waterloo, nothing that came after the Retreat from Moscow has had power to obscure his fame. When at last he was shot before that blank wall in the Luxembourg, a victim

to the discords of the French, his fate only served to perpetuate and to make perhaps immortal his great renown. Clothed in the memory of that Retreat and of his guardianship of the wreck of the Grand Army, Napoleon's phrase for him, "the bravest of the brave," has not sounded theatrical or even exaggerated in the ears of posterity.

This man was of Lorraine, or (if the term be preferred) Germanic in blood. He was born in one of those frontier towns which have been disputed between the Roman civilization and the Germanies for two thousand years, Saarlouis. The son of a soldier and trained in the tradition of arms, in age an exact contemporary of Napoleon's, he had enlisted in the hussars just before the outbreak of the Revolutionary Wars, twenty-four years before, and had risen from rank to rank in the rapid promotion of those enthusiastic days. Not yet commissioned at Valmy, an officer at Jemappes, a captain before the end of the Terror, and commanding his troops at Fleurus under Kleber, he owed to that strong Alsatian, also of the frontiers, the first recognition of his talent. Four years later he was commanding in chief upon the Rhine. He had not yet met Bonaparte, or served under him, and all that he had done, both up till then and for two years more, had been done either

in conjunction with, or under the orders of, men whom Bonaparte still regarded as rivals.

It was not until 1801 that the two men, equal in age, parallel in their mastery of war, differing in all else, met for the first time in Paris; and the Corsican, lean, grave, and judging with firelit eyes that seemed darker than they were, saw the square, rubicund figure just taller than his own, frank, red-headed (and red-whiskered), obviously of the cavalry, as obviously made for no political ambition but for plain leadership—and took him for the work in Switzerland.

During the eleven years that followed Ney remained and rose with that group which remained and rose around Napoleon, and formed his insufficient aristocracy, his famous marshals.

Fortunate errors, an unwavering capacity in the management of great bodies of men, an exaggeration in the use of his own arm, his decisive, though perilous stroke at Friedland, had made up in six years the sum of his military reputation. He was more than half suspected of too favoring a fortune, but it earned him Napoleon's own nickname of "the lion." The years of victory would, however, have left this man no more than any one of his few peers in the work which the French did

throughout Western Europe, had not there come to complete them for history, and to give him his individual place, this episode of disaster. It is the name of Ney, his short, broad figure, broad face, and fixed light eyes, his control of himself and of his remnant, even his survival, that is the chief mark of the Retreat.

The IIIrd Corps, then, under Ney, with its two meager divisions, still beat off day after day the perpetual pressure, as it had now become, of the Russian irregular cavalry, and even from time to time of some portion of the enemy's body.

Those days were overcast, the sun was lost, and the cold, though fluctuating from one day to another, still held the army fast. Still, as the rear-guard fell back, march upon march, each division holding the uttermost place against the enemy alternately (each regiment within each division also alternately holding the extreme of the line), it passed (through a ceaseless scurry of high wind and feather-white weather) by the burned-out bivouacs, where not only the dead and frozen but the dying also were left behind; it saw, dull howling day after dull howling day, the strewn wreckage of the Grand Army. For, day after day,

that howling wind still blew, driving the snow before it: and now, for the first time in the midst of so many ruins and of so much loot abandoned, abandoned cannon were beginning to be passed—those guns which had been the pride of the gunners before fate had struck. One piece after another could be seen left fast in the snow, with a wheel gone and the slanting limber half covered in the drift, and lying by it so much of the carcasses of the team as the haste of the famished men that had gone before had denied to their hunger.

From Viasma onward was three days before the bulk of the army came (thus fighting continually and losing—I had almost said by companies—men that died round the poor fires at night or fell hopeless in the snow) to the first obstacle. The Dnieper lay before them. Its great bend must be crossed to make direct for Smolensk beyond. This barrier of water was a peril, for, if their pursuers could march up fast enough to hold them there, the survivors of the host would be caught in bulk and destroyed.

And here I must leave for a moment the rearguard and consider those masses which pressed on before, with Smolensk for their goal; for it is

an eye-witness present in the main army who gives us the most vivid picture of the crossing: the white plain as he saw it at this check, the first water crossing, its difficult passage, and the hampered, lessened, reaching of Smolensk which followed.

XXVIII

FEW obstacles impeded that limping haste back westward through the cold in which the ninety thousand had not yet, by the middle of November, lost all strength of organization, nor yet, for the majority, their arms.

One obstacle alone, a week's march ahead and more, the Beresina, was to try the last strength of the army and, in spite of its successful crossing, to dissolve it. But such checks as Nature presented to these broken men (very few though these checks were) should be rememberd by all who desire to follow the disaster and to note the steps through which the army fell from an ill-ordered but combative line to a diminished herd, and at last to a few groups of stragglers drifting half dead into Vilna.

Of the Beresina I deal in its place. Here I speak of an earlier and much slighter thing, but still, the first check. This first of the obstacles was the crossing of this water, the Dnieper, three days or so before Smolensk, and there has remained for our guidance a description of this

crossing sufficiently vivid to guide our judgment of it. It is one of the clearest pictures of the Retreat.

The great road from Moscow to the frontier has passed through many miles of marshy woods, a whole day's march and more, when it comes to what is now the rail-head of a local railway from Smolensk, and the meeting of several streams, one of which is still called the Dnieper, but all of which rather unite here to form the Dnieper; for the Dnieper henceforward flows with a name and a character of its own, first westward, and then southward to the Black Sea. The great road, following as it naturally must the direct line, goes past the upper sources of the Russian rivers or the watersheds between. This road had seemed to the Staff of the Grand Army during its advance upon Moscow in the hot summer, months before, to be impeded nowhere east of Smolensk by any considerable stream.

At this very place—where now the desperate and broken but still considerable army must pass a broad river to reach Smolensk, its stores, and some imagined opportunity for repose—that army had three months before passed at will over a trickling gully rather than a stream bed. The river had then been so little troubled with water

that in its immediate neighborhood men still complained of thirst, and the guns had been driven through the ford with no need for any bridge and without wetting the axles of their wheels or the knees of their teams. They had gone, the great army of them (after the fatal error had been committed and Smolensk left behind for the advance on Moscow), they had gone baked in the dusty heat, but all of them certain of victory. No one man of them had imagined what winter would be, nor where he would be in the snowfall, nor any possibility of this returning road and of seeing such things as all now saw with their eyes turned backwards towards Europe: and the hope of home lessening as each night fell. Nor did any man, not even the best instructed, set out to consider in the summer advance what that dried watercourse would have become, and what that tumbled plain and its woods would look like, in a winter retreat.

It was a great, clear view. No snow fell on that day, and the very low and heavy sky, all even and motionless gray, did not mix with the horizon, but rather afforded along the horizon a background for the sharp rim of white so many miles around. All the world was white except four things which were black: the trees, here

and there the burned huts by the roadside, the long marks of water in the hollows of the land, and the enormous stippled belts of the Retreat.

I say "the stippled belts of the Retreat": for as you looked from one slight lift of snow-covered roll over the long shallow dip before you, westward and up to the next slight lift and then over that again to another flat crest beyond, and so to the horizon, what you saw was, not a body of marching men, nor formed organizations, nor even a straggling line, but rather, in ribboned groups, a vast number of little black isolated things that cast no shadow (for there was no sun), and these were either creeping through the snow or lying still. The moving and the unmoving alike were not linked out upon the line of any road (for no road was marked at all through that white expanse of glare and cold), but the whole was scattered right and left upon half a mile of front or more; wagons abandoned, and dying men and little groups still going forward, and men going forward by themselves, and here and there an oblong of guns pushing and pulling as it could through such deep and half-frozen stuff.

And through the lowest of those very shallow and very broad dips, lying between the very low rolls which hardly diversified the immensity of

the plain, there appeared here and there, but not continuously, curving slugs of blackness which made a discontinuous procession from the extreme north of the view on the right hand, meandering to the south upon the left. These were the last unfrozen lanes of the river. Looking before you, you might see crossing this (the only strictly ordered thing in all that waste) a broad band with pointed edges upon either side, black also in the whiteness. This was the bridge of boats.

Across it for some time a column of men and horses and wagons and limbers and guns narrowed, making a waist in the mile upon mile of the broad belts of the Retreat.

But there came a moment when the bridge of boats broke asunder, and then the belt spread out again and the little black points (which were horses and men) were seen daring the passage of the frozen water above and below (for it was shallow), but—a very ominous thing for the army not yet even at Smolensk—one great tumbled mass remained motionless upon the hither side of the stream, neither having crossed it nor able to cross it.

As you watched that dark lump all confused, stationary in outline, but full of movement within, you might see a movement spread out from it, and

take the shape of distant moving specks. These were the gun teams ridden off by their drivers with the traces cut. What was left behind lay quite without movement. It was the first great block of artillery to be abandoned in the breakdown; from sixty to one hundred guns.

So, as you watched through that short winter day, knowing that the vanguard of those interminable belts of little black figures against the snow was already in Smolensk with Napoleon, and that all their units creeping or stumbling or hauling forward were making also for that now possible goal, you might have heard behind you to the eastward a ceaseless dull thudding, one minute after another, then several together, then a lull, then more again, which meant the guns of the rearguard and Ney holding off the pursuit.

XXIX

THE story of the Retreat from Moscow is the story of a whole army destroyed: all the main force of the man who (as heir to the Revolution) had already reorganized Europe, and who, had that force remained whole, would have spared us many a pang of a new birth not yet delivered. For Napoleon should have refounded a united Europe. This he did not do. But he did not wholly fail; and the reason his partial foundation survives was that his chiefs also survived the Retreat.

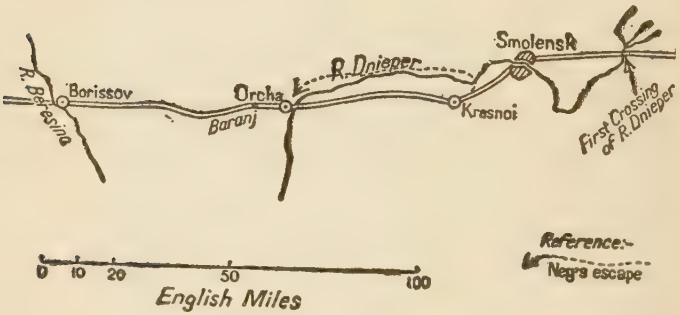
In the destruction of that army what is notable is that the chiefs remained to attempt for two years more, and nearly three, the salvation of their glory and of the edifice they had raised.

That these chiefs avoided capture, that Napoleon himself reached France again, was what made the main difference to history. We shall see later how the Russians should have caught the Emperor upon the Beresina—and failed to do so.

Among those who were saved in spite of them-

selves, and who survived for a much worse personal fate than capture or death in the plains, was Ney: and I have here to recount how this Commander of the Rearguard, by one of the most astonishing episodes in the history of war, escaped the fate that fell upon the mass of the army.

It was some days after the army had left Smolensk. The weather had changed again. The



great cold had softened, and damp mists hung over the half-frozen flat. The great road was darker with slush and mud. All that were still with Napoleon had pressed forward as best they could, with now so very many disarmed, and with so few wheeled things left to carry provisions. The fresh Russian armies were getting close, up from the south and down from the north. Kutusoff still pressed. It was life or death to be at

the crossing of the Beresina before the trap should close.

At that crossing lay the town of Borissov. Behind it, about a week's march east, lay Orcha, where was the second bridge over the Dnieper and the crossing of that river. To Orcha, then, Napoleon hastened, and by a perilous halt at Krasnoi, which I cannot here describe, but which gave time for all the army *save the rearguard* to come up, he just saved (for the moment) the force still holding to him, and then, at the last moment, before the Russians might have fallen upon him, he pressed forward again upon the Orcha road. In doing so he doomed—or thought that he doomed—the rearguard.

It was just as the late winter dawn was graying the fogs above the snowfields that Napoleon so decided, and gave the order to go forward. He stood under that dull half-light, a Polish cap of marten fur upon his head, and, covering all his short stout body, a green velvet-lined coat trimmed with fur and marked by gold braid. He had in his right hand the thick birchen staff which he so carried during all the last days of the Retreat, and which all saw and remembered the next week at the Beresina. This was the figure of the man, beaded with the mist and sodden, when he took

under the gray sky of that morning the determination to advance, even though it should cost him the bravest of his friends, and one whole fraction of what was left of his army. With the Emperor himself thus going forward were now but some 25,000 men. Ney, covering the rear far off with the IIIrd Corps, had not 6,000. Had the Emperor waited for the rearguard the trap might close on him before the Beresina was reached. Napoleon could not risk the greater for the lesser, and he went forward. Immediately after he had passed, and passed with losses but in safety, the main Russian army found the gap between the main army and the rearguard, the IIIrd Corps, pushed into that gap, formed astraddle of the highroad, and when the rearguard approached twenty-four hours later they saw their retreat to Orcha, to the west and to the only bridge across the Dnieper, blocked by a force more than ten times their own.

What followed was perhaps the most striking episode of all the war. Six thousand men or less, I say, marshaled in two divisions, were Ney's command; huddled behind them were as many more unarmed followers, wounded, stragglers, and what not, that pressed and encumbered this last fragment of the Grand Army.

Kutusoff made no doubt of what the result must be. He had stepped in with all his 80,000 and his dozens of batteries between the IIIrd Army Corps and all that had gone before. The IIIrd Army Corps was cut off and must surrender.

It was in such a mood that the Russian general sent an envoy to Ney pointing out the hopelessness of any resistance; offering a truce in which the marshal might assure himself of the strength of his enemy, and expecting, when he had so assured himself of it, that marshal's surrender. Even as the parleying continued, certain Russian guns opened by some accident upon the French, and Ney, whether from indignation at what he thought to be treachery or, more probably, from a determination already formed, arrested the officer who had been sent to demand his surrender, and ordered the immediate advance of the second division against the overwhelming Russian line.

It is not often possible in writing the history of war to explain upon any reasonable theory the accidents which determine its greatest events. Why this strange or mad attack in column of at best but 3,000 men against 80,000 should have been attempted we may ascribe to any one of three causes, but we have no notes to determine the matter. It may have been a mere miscalcula-

tion, though that, I think, was unlikely with all those thousands upon thousands of the foe ranked up "until the snow looked black with them," and set, moreover, upon the slopes of the slight rise of Krasnoi, which displayed their numbers the more. Nor was their multitude of guns either silent or unseen, while Ney's remnant had but *six* pieces all told and no cavalry whatsoever—the horses of the troopers had all been eaten; those of the escort and of a few carts alone remained.

It may have been an indignant determination to go down fighting; or it may have been (and this I cannot but believe to have been the reason) a calculation upon Ney's part that the brief daylight, already advanced, might be spent in the action, and that this attack of one against twenty might, when the November dusk should have fallen, afford some chance of escape for the bulk of his command. At any rate, the second division was sent forward and—it was utterly broken to pieces. Of one regiment, the 4th, we have details: Of two men who went up the slope in that regiment, one returned, and this wiping out of half its force was a matter of half an hour. The second division was supported by the first. The attack, though certainly impossible of achieving its end, was continued until, just when the light

began to fail, Kutusoff perceived that the confused mass of Frenchmen and Italians before him were being led back towards Smolensk, eastward.

He might have destroyed that mass even in the little glimmer of daylight which remained. He did not move. Probably because he was quite certain that his enemy had no issue. To the north ran the Dnieper, and any attempt to pass the Russian army round its flanks to the south in the darkness he guarded against by extending very far to the southward a line that should make impossible any such maneuver. Ney and what was left of his command Kutusoff cannot but have believed lost, and his surrender or the dissolution of the whole body to be a matter now of no more than this one desperate night.

Nevertheless, though Ney had thus wasted men in his hopeless attack upon the slope of Krasnoi, I think he had a plan, and that what he did when darkness had fallen was not an afterthought.

This is what he did. He went on eastward under the evening until it was quite dark; then, at the crossing of one of those numerous ravined watercourses which cut the main road, he bade one break the ice and see which way the water flowed. The answer came that it flowed to the north, to the left. Then Ney knew that by fol-

lowing that brook he would find the Dnieper. He led them through the darkness, on by the bank of this brook, over the snow, leaving the high road and going continually northward. One of Ney's Poles brought in out of the darkness a peasant. He was lame. He told them they were an hour from the Dnieper, and that there was no ford, and that the thaw must have broken up the ice on the main stream: it would no longer be frozen over, said the limping one. But Ney answered him with French rhetoric, *"Il le sera."* They went forward, then, for one whole hour with the lame man for a guide until, at some time between eight and nine o'clock, they came to a broad belt of lighter gleam in the night, which was the river.

I know the river: I have watched the deserted empty mass of brushwood to the south, the low, but steep, wooded height upon the farther bank, and the stream swirling westward beneath it after the rains. It was an astonishing thing that happened on that night a hundred and ten years ago, and I am glad that I have seen it with my own eyes, from that turn in the bank which caught the drift-ice and made a jam: a bridge of piled and jostling ice just passable, though both below and above that jam the river was not passable at all.

An officer of the marshal's first tried the ice,

treading through the black air, sounding the grinding pack as he went. He reached the farther bank, not without fear of drowning, for the crushed ice still moved; it was cracked and wet with the thaw, and was neither everywhere even nor everywhere strong; but he came back across it again and reported that with care the passage might be made. Everything else must be left behind.

For three long hours, almost until midnight, Ney waited for the stragglers to come up, and, by one report, during those hours he slept upon the snow with his great coat round him for bedding. Then, when all that were left to him had come up, the crossing began. There were crevices which men stepped over in the darkness with doubt, and there were places where the ice yielded and crackled. But with infinite pains, and only one by one, the little body of combatants reached the northern shore. Whether from despair or from pity, an attempt was made to bring over at least one of the carts with wounded, but the ice broke beneath it, and by the time the passage was effected every gun and all but some pocketfuls of provisions and most of the wounded, and most of the herd of followers had been left, abandoned upon the southern bank.

When the next day broke upon this astonishing adventure, and the huddled ruin of the IIIrd Corps could be roughly numbered, Ney found that he had thus saved alive half, or a little less than half, of that small body with which he had made the desperate attempt at Krasnoi; and of that half only half again were still armed. The IIIrd Corps was now but 1,500 effectives, another 1,500 disarmed—and that was all.

But the Dnieper was crossed; they had only to follow its stream to find Orcha, and they had put the water of it between them and the main army of their foes. They thought themselves in safety, and were revived. So, and after such a night and whatever snatches of sleep one man and another had found it possible to take, they groped forward through the unknown country, along the right bank of the river, until the first light of the new day showed them the bare trees and their way.

XXX

WHEN the dull day broke the half-disarmed three thousand wandered at first, somewhat at random, westward over the big hedgeless expanse from wood to wood. They comforted themselves with the renewal of tolerable weather in the thaw, and were protected, as they hoped, from any attack because a mist still environed them.

But indeed they feared no attack. They had put the Dnieper between themselves and the Russian army: that force in its overwhelming numbers was far to the south, and they themselves were upon the northern bank of the river. Roughly following that northern bank, still keeping the trend of the stream in view, and only so far from it as permitted them to advance uninterrupted by brushwood and by the reeds of the shore, they went forward, hoping to reach, in perhaps three days (still following the great river round in its southward bend) the bridge where Napoleon also, with his twenty-five remaining thousand, would be crossing: the bridge of Orcha. There must have been many in that small com-

mand of the rearguard, that poor rag of the IIIrd Army Corps (now not one-tenth of what had crossed the Niemen five months before)—there must have been many, I say, who jested in their imagined security, and who wondered what the main body would say when they saw their rearguard, which the Emperor himself had thought most certainly doomed, surviving after all and coming up to Orcha no longer a rearguard, but actually ahead of the rest!

The midnight crossing upon that perilous belt of breaking ice slushed over with the thaw, had heartened them even in so terrible a crux. Something had been done. It was a great adventure after the dull hours of day upon day. Better still; as the light broadened they came to something like a broad track—all that Russia could call a road—just marked upon the melting snow. But here their poor ghost of merriment ceased, for certain men going forward before the rest reported that they had found, somewhat ahead, the marks of many horse-hoofs and the long lines of sledge-runners going like serpents through the snow. Moreover, as Ney's saved remnant pressed on towards the rim of that weak horizon, the broad track now marked upon the snow grew worse and worse. Many thousands had surely passed that

way—all mounted; and the trail of the sledge-runners meant, for these men who had known the strange novelties of the great disaster, *light guns* borne on sledges by the Cossacks.

The truth was that Platoff, with his large body of irregular cavalry, was somewhere about; that he had with him guns, light pieces mounted on sledges; and that here, his prey, were these few Illyrians and French and Poles of the IIIrd Corps, with not a gun, with hardly a horse, and with only such ammunition as came from the careful dividing among the companies of the few cartridges left after the fighting at Krasnoi. Nor had they long to wait before they had good proof of how near Platoff and his men might be. They found a few Cossacks asleep in the huts of a village: they took them prisoners, and they learned what certitude they were under of destruction, for their prisoners, in number about one hundred, told them that Platoff and *six thousand* were near. In this village, also, the rearguard found what it had lacked so long—food, shelter, and even a certain store of clothing.

The confused accounts of those perilous days make it not easy to decide the moment when first the Russian irregulars discovered their chance and smelled out that little band of Ney's pushing along

the riverside by the road, making westward with what speed it could for Orcha and the bulk of the army. But I take it to have been the next morning (and not much after daybreak) when certain outposts of the Cossacks fell back before Ney's column, and about midnight—just after two more villages had been occupied, and looted for food by his men—that Ney saw coming upon him the swarm of the mounted lancers.

They left the villages, again going westward, and kept off the first attacks of that cavalry by an orderly firing.

An eye-witness tells us that, in spite of the hopeless odds, the three thousand had no fear for their formation. They marched in column and regularly enough, protected by small parties on their flank, who had but few occasions to fire, because the Russian irregulars would never charge home against infantry while it still kept its rank. But towards the end of that day Platoff's cannon also came up, drawn on its sledges, and the gun-fire had begun to tell upon Ney's little column just as night fell. So ended the first day.

It will be a matter of astonishment to the reader that Platoff, though in command of 6,000 men, all mounted, and having with him also those light guns, did not make an end of Ney and his

3,000. The reason is that Ney, with great wisdom, took that night to the belt of wood which runs all along the Dnieper, where it makes its great bend to the south; from the cover of that wood, now driving off a charge from its edge, now firing at such dispersed horsemen as had attempted to hold so thick a cover, the French and their companions still went forward and westward by such paths as they could find.

I say nothing of the great losses—a third, a half, and more falling out. The matter is that Ney and some torn scrap of the IIIrd Army Corps continued hour after hour nearing and still nearing Orcha; but they were now little more than a thousand.

Upon the second evening the exhausted hundreds that remained halted in a village, where (by good luck again) they found provisions. They had still more than twenty miles between them and Orcha bridge, and during the first hours of that night they expected at any moment the final attack of their pursuers.

At one in the morning the many who slept heard the drums beat (for there was still so much of order in that army), and one man (who has left us the story) woke to see the flames on every side, for the village had been set on fire. The French were

marching out. They had been attacked, but the attack had blundered in the night, and Ney's command was once more saved. It marched until daylight in security and in silence. During the day the Cossacks charged again and again, and twice Ney had to form squares.

There were many moments (so the colonel of one of the "regiments" tells us—and a regiment for him was not 200 men), there were many moments when it seemed as though the poor harried pack must dissolve.

But there was something in Ney that kept them all together. His calm and the strength of his body, his resistance to all those physical things under which other men were failing, and that power which men have (not so much from nature as from a continued command) of ordering and enlivening their fellows, made him a master. So all that day they held together—but barely.

With the next morning Ney sent a Polish officer forward, who reached Orcha (now near at hand) and brought news to the main army that the rearguard had been saved.

It was the third day after the perilous crossing of the river on the ice. Napoleon himself had left Orcha, and most of his men. He was over the bridge and ahead down the road at Baranj;

he was dining. He had, as he sat down to that desert meal in the burned huts of the place, a full conviction that Ney was lost, and the rearguard with him. He had convinced himself of that loss three days before. But just as he began to eat there came in a messenger who said, "Ney is at the bridge of Orcha"; and without understanding at first how the thing had happened, Napoleon accepted the miracle and renewed his hope of some issue for himself also from such toils. Since Ney had found a way through against stark impossibilities, so should he. But when he asked a little later what of the IIIrd Army Corps remained, he learned that, of the early weeks' 6,000, *not nine hundred* had won through; no guns; no cavalry—the few horses of the escort alone.

This was what Ney led up next day to his master: and this was all that still answered the call out of nearly 40,000 of his own command who had marched into Russia so confident under the summer sky.

XXXI

IN this chapter it will be my business to describe the last episode of that catastrophe in which the effort of the French Revolution turned. It is called in history "The Beresina." Subsequent to the horror and the unexpected success of that passage nothing remained for the Grand Army but to die; and, as my readers will learn, it stumbled into the more or less friendly retreats of Lithuania, a bare week after crossing the Beresina River, uncaptured, its Emperor already far off and in safety; its leaders free for the great business of ending the wars at Leipsic and at Waterloo, one and two and three years on. But the Grand Army itself was now a name only. It had gone in the snows.

At the Beresina more than at any other point in this strange story, the end of the Revolutionary Wars should have come. Napoleon should there most certainly—even if nowhere else in all the hundreds of miles from Moscow—have been barred from Europe, his person held, the very

title of his military instrument destroyed, and the French effort concluded.

That Napoleon crossed, that the dreadful ruin of his army reached the farther bank, that the name for the end of the Revolution is not "The Beresina" but "Waterloo"—history owes all this to one of its most eccentric accidents; and, as we read the epic of those soldiers who reconstructed Europe from Valmy to '15, there is no feat of theirs more typical of their ceaseless suffering and unfailing will than their forcing of this half-frozen river to no purpose but the personal saving of some few chiefs and of honor against strategical conditions which made disaster certain and the conjuring of it a miracle. I think that if we would understand the temper of the Grand Army—which is that of the Revolution behind it—its motive, its power of assimilating men from all around, its unconscious rectitude, we shall see it nowhere better than in this one of its final achievements: for the sappers who built the bridges, waist deep in frozen water, and who died; the scouts who, in such weather, found the crossing-place; the remaining energy which delivered the southern feint against the enemy; and, most characteristic of all, the foreign auxiliaries wholly sacrificed in the last hours that permitted the crossing to be accom-

plished—all these are the story of the Revolutionary Wars in little and give us that soul by which the revolutionary thing was done.

First, then, let me recall what the strategical conditions were.

My readers will remember that—while the dwindling frozen columns of Napoleon were pushing as best they could westward down the main road, while Kutusoff (either not prompt enough, or willfully pursuing a Fabian plan) was hanging on their flank, while Platoff with his Cossacks was raiding, intercepting, stinging, cutting off and founding a legend—that while all this was happening, right in front of the Retreat, graver than any pursuit, lay the menace of a prison gate which might be slammed in the face of the pursued. From the north probably, from the south certainly, separate armies of the Russians, each free to act and each opposed by forces quite inferior, were converging far ahead to close Napoleon's door to safety. Each of those armies alone might cut off the broken invader; their junction would certainly destroy him.

The reader will further remember that yet one more obstacle lay before Napoleon, one last check upon which these Western enemies could, if they acted with no more than an elementary strategy,

arrest him. That check and obstacle was the Beresina River. In the delay and difficulty of its crossing (there was no further impediment to the West) an enemy holding its banks was master of the wretched, half-armed thousands that still trailed in the following of the Emperor and that still bore with them the wounded eagles.

We shall see that that obstacle was not used by the Russians, that the banks of the river were not held as they should have been, and that against all chance and prediction the Beresina was passed and the Grand Army (its name at least) permitted to reach the friendly towns, and its chiefs to say that they had escaped alive, with battle still before them, from the marshes and the plains in which they had left their invincible fame.

Before I describe how this last feat was achieved I must present to the reader some picture of the place which was to be the scene of its accomplishment.

The great road from Moscow to the West crosses the Beresina by a bridge at the town of Borissov. The river is here about sixty miles in a direct line from its source, but such figures give no idea to an English reader of a stream upon the watershed of Russia. So very slight is the general slope, so rare and so small the tributaries in the

upper part of the Beresina's course, that the river by the time it reaches Borissov, is still to the eye a watercourse of no great effect. Indeed, Borissov, itself a small place, is the first human grouping of any size which the commerce of the river can afford; and all that the water is yet capable of doing is to float, when there has been a sufficient fall of rain, light rafts of logs down stream from the forests that surround the town (itself all of wood) and stretch northward indefinitely through a half-deserted countryside. Though somewhat broader, the impression the Beresina here conveys is not unjustly represented by that of the River Thames near Oxford. But it is shallower, often broken with shoals, and the space from one shore to the other seems, as one stands by its side, so short a distance that one might marvel—if one did not know what obstacles are to an army—that ever it should have played the part it did in the story of 1812. The level of its water suddenly rises and falls as does that of all these unmastered and barbaric streams, for it is not canalized; but the difference of its depth after and before a rainfall has been exaggerated by those many historians who have written vividly upon the matter of the Beresina without being at the pains of visiting its dull trees and sedges. Hardly ever are its

fords (numerous so early on its course) impracticable even after storms, nor, so far westward, is summer or a long frost sufficient to exhaust its water. Some miles above the town of Borissov a marshy lake helps to regulate the flow, and in general it may be said that the Beresina is passable, though passable with difficulty, in this region at any period of the year. One obstinate feature, however, is apparent at intervals throughout its upper course and especially above Borissov, which is a belt of marsh some hundred or two hundred yards broad, now on the western bank, now on the eastern, and now on both. We shall see that a fortunate increase of the frost (the first time that this scourge of the Retreat *was* fortunate) permitted the overcoming of what might have been the most formidable difficulty of all, for marsh is by far the worst obstacle an army can meet.

It must, in the last place, be remarked by the reader that while, like nearly all the landscape of the Retreat, the countryside through which this upper Beresina flows is united and of very little difference in contour, yet immediately upon the banks of the stream there stand, often for a mile or two, wooded slopes which, low as they are, afford a position. This is particularly true of the farther or western shore, and, as we shall see when

we come to follow the building of the bridges and the passage of the army, the proper occupation of this somewhat higher western bank would have given to an enemy properly alert an added superiority and an added certitude of mastery.

I say again the Grand Army should never have crossed, and Napoleon should here have ended his affair with the world. How it crossed, and how he saved himself for another and a greater fate, I shall next describe.

XXXII

THE great crises of history impose upon one who would describe them two disparate and equally necessary tasks. He must use, within the limits of his power, much the same instruments as those which are required for fiction, inasmuch as he is required to present to his reader a limited and vivid picture that can be remembered. Yet he is also required to use all those inhuman materials of exactitude, detail, and too numerous fact from which fiction particularly frees itself, and only through that freedom can pretend to conciseness and vigor.

How, then, shall I best put before my readers the enormity of Napoleon's peril as he approached this fatal river, and the chance in a thousand whereby the Emperor was saved? Though he was only saved for the miracles of '13, of '14 (the greatest campaign of his life), in order to fall in the third year, yet his salvation at the Beresina should be read and reread as the best proof in modern history that war is not chess, but wrestling,

and not mechanical, but human, and in no way subject to prediction.

I think the best way in which the business can be approached is to refer it in the modern reader's mind to two things, each familiar, the days of a week and the topography of his own country. No landscapes are more utterly different than those of the Russian march and of England: the endless rise and fall of that bare sea of land, undivided by hedge or metaled road or fence, diversified only by standing islands of wood, or long coast-lines of it where a forest makes, as it were, a continent—the very aspect of that land is so utterly different from all we know here that to realize it is impossible until it has been seen. But distances and numbers can be expressed upon an English parallel, and this strategic crux depended upon numbers and upon distance alone.

It was a Sunday, then, when Napoleon, one day out of Orcha, stood debating in the slush of the thaw, under the early morning, what chance of escape there might be. The Beresina barrier lay before him at something of the distance which the Thames is from Bedford: Borissov, with its one bridge, stood to him as Oxford does upon the English river. He must make for that barrier,

the only bridge across which was the bridge at Borissov, he must gain the farther bank unimpeded by one force of the enemy, which lay near by, uncaught by a second force of the enemy, which pursued, and before yet a third force of the enemy lying off to his right could interfere with his march. All these three forces menaced his straggling line as it went forward. All were converging upon that one bridge of Borissov, where the great road passed the river, and he, Napoleon, was in the center of the convergence.

His doubt and his anxiety would have changed, even in such a mind, to despair if he could have seen, as posterity can see with its advantage of record, the positions and the strength of his opponents.

What were their numbers compared with his own?

And what were their positions?

There were not 20,000 muskets and sabers in the continuous French command upon the great road. Half of these were a mass at the head of the column nearest the river and mainly composed of a fresh force under Oudinot, which had just joined it; another 11,000 under Victor lay some fifteen miles away to the right of the line of march

to cover the column from the threatened attack on that side. If we put a small force at Oxford itself, holding the bridge, Oudinot and his men near Aylesbury, Napoleon with the Guards, as I have said, near Bedford on that Sunday, Victor at Banbury, and all of them of necessity dependent for escape upon the Oxford bridge (the only bridge across the Thames), if we regard the total number of those who were armed, both of the fresh troops which had not suffered the Retreat and of the old, as, roughly, 30,000 men, if we remember that the great pack of now disarmed stragglers (how numerous none can tell) were but a grave weakness to those still armed, then we shall have a fair conception of how the French and their allies, Polish, Italian, and German, stood.

What of their enemies upon that same Sunday? It is in *their* numbers and situation that what I have called the enormity of the peril appears.

Kutusoff, with the main Russian army in pursuit, well provisioned, well mounted, and in mere numbers two to one compared with the pursued, was on the heels of the army, pressing its last bodies, barely twenty miles behind the Emperor himself. I have put Napoleon at Bedford on that

Sunday; you may put the heads of the main Russian columns in pursuit at Huntingdon.

But this great and well-found host of Kutusoff's was, as we have seen, but one of three. Another army, in itself as numerous as all the French forces, lay up over against Victor on the right of the march not thirty miles away, and able to come down upon its flank; for Wittgenstein, who commanded it, stood to the road between Orcha and Borissov as, say, Leamington stands to the road from Bedford to Oxford.

Even if these two armies, *each* far larger than his whole command, could not prevent the Emperor from crossing the river—even, that is, if Kutusoff were so sluggish in pursuit and Wittgenstein so uncertain or so successfully held off by Victor's gravely inferior numbers that the Emperor should just reach the bridge in time—yet a third army threatened him in a more serious fashion. Tshitshagov with 35,000 men had come up from the south and was now, to Napoleon's knowledge, somewhere in the immediate neighborhood of the Beresina, just where the passage lay: he already menaced, from the farther side, the bridge by which the fragment of the Grand Army and its commander hoped to reach the West. It was as though, in our English parallel, such an

enemy force were threatening the Oxford crossing from the countryside of Didcot and Abingdon.

The trap was complete, and, I repeat, to one who could have seen in a general view all those groups of men and that black line of water through the melting snows with its one bridge at Borissov, no chance of safety seemed to offer. Close on 120,000 enemies, all well equipped, all with their organization unimpaired, lay in three great groups right round the frozen huddle of the Grand Army, which had not, to oppose such numbers, one man to three—more nearly one to four. And of those strong, organized, and converging enemy forces, one was already almost at the bridge.

During that same Sunday, while Napoleon was attempting, upon those distorted rumors and reports which alone serve a general in the field, to discover where his enemies precisely lay, or at what rate they were closing upon him, there took place an action which should by every rule of war have determined the matter altogether. This action was the capture of Borissov and of its bridge by Tshitshagov's men. In other words, the third Russian army was—by that Sunday evening—not only menacing from the farther side the passage of the river, but was actually across it, and the end of Napoleon, as yet ignorant of such appalling

news, seemed by all human calculation to have come.

Yet that end failed. Though a full week's delay intervened, yet by the next Sunday the Emperor was across the stream, with the way to Europe open before him.

XXXIII

SÉGUR, the most vivid witness to the war (and, therefore, the most abused), has, upon the ultimate passage of the Beresina and the successful crossing of what was still called the Grand Army, a phrase so memorable and exact that it is worthy of Tacitus. For *thus*, he says, *by this accident, all was not lost: both peace and war.*

If that phrase be expanded it will be found to mean that the capture of Napoleon and the surrender of the twenty-odd thousand armed, of their more numerous disarmed stragglers, and the total extinction of the Revolution in the Russian plains —upon the very edge of the West, just as freedom and Poland were in sight—would have involved the ruin of the Revolutionary effort.

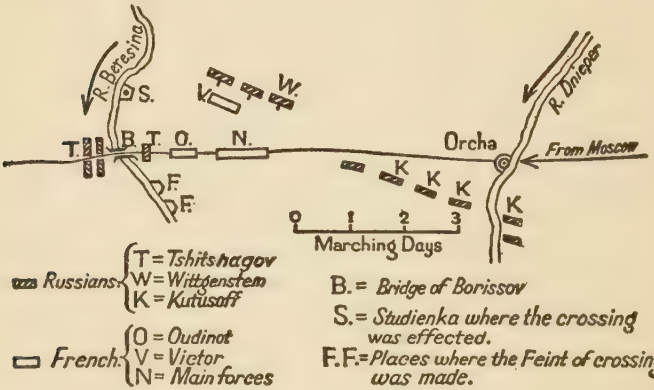
I think he is right. Napoleon there captured, and the Grand Army laying down its arms in a corporate fashion, the Old Guard piling its muskets, and the marshals surrendering their swords, would have been a curtain to a tragedy, and a curtain coming at so complete a moment

that no further drama would have followed. These things are spiritual. Germany would have had no need for "liberation": the garrisons would have fallen apart of themselves. France would not have seen Bonaparte shining again through Napoleon, nor have heard, just at the right moment to save its survival, the Marseillaise of the Hundred Days uprising over the despair of the First Restoration. But, most important of all, this passage of the Beresina, the saving of Napoleon's person for future effort, the survival of the marshals and of the name at least of the Grand Army, presented the Revolution in its last agony as a thing that would fight to the end, that would have behind it the confused tradition of the populace throughout the West, that would compel its enemies to exaggerate their creed through terror, and that would, by dying in such a fashion, proclaim its resurrection.

All these things became possible because the Beresina was crossed.

I have described how the remnant which Napoleon still commanded was, as it approached the river, menaced by the three armies of Russia, and how upon that Sunday in particular the westernmost of these three converging armies all around had carried the bridge of Borissov and

held the town. I have shown how, by all the common sense of strategy, the Grand Army and its commander were doomed. The only bridge over the river was now in the hands of Tshitshagov; Wittgenstein was coming down from the right with nothing to oppose him but the feeble flanking corps of Victor; Kutusoff was immediately in the rear.



The extremity of the peril can best be grasped through a slight sketch such as I here append. In this it is difficult indeed to estimate a normal marching day, for the snows and the lack of ways, the alternate frost and thaw, the exhaustion of the moment, all confused the calculations of normal times. But I have put twelve English miles as the unit of a full marching day upon my scale

so as to average the pace of the most pressed in this desperate pass with the delay of the most tardy. With W for Wittgenstein's force, then, T for Tshitshagov, K for Kutusoff, while (of Napoleon's forces) O marks Oudinot's command, V Victor's, and N the main body, something of this sort marked the situation upon the Sunday when the trap seemed closed and the Emperor doomed.

The marvel by which the Emperor was saved rose from four chances. First, Oudinot recaptured Borissov (B) and thus cleared the hither bank of the river, though he could not save the bridge. Second, Kutusoff, true to what he called his plan, and what was certainly his habit, lost all the time he could, and, with less than twenty miles to press forward upon the rear of the retreating huddle of stragglers and the little body of armed men, failed to press forward at all. Third, Wittgenstein, who might have determined everything by fourteen miles across country, tied himself to a road (such a road! You should see it!) and behaved as though a tactical problem were a strategical one. Fourth and finally (the chief cause of the Russian failure) Tshitshagov failed to discover the point which the French ultimately chose for their crossing-place, and allowed him-

self to be deceived by feints lower down the stream.

This is what happened. Oudinot, marching forward along the great road towards Borissov (B) and its bridge, on that Sunday met the advance guard of the Russians on their way out of Borissov eastward. He attacked the Russian vanguard. He threw it into confusion. He piled it up upon the main troops behind it. These in turn spread the rout into Borissov itself. The very fact that Tshitshagov had captured the bridge and the town divided that Western Russian army of his into two bodies separated by the river, and only the smaller of them was as yet on its eastern bank. All that smaller part which had already crossed the bridge was broken up by Oudinot; it retreated too hastily over the bridge upon the main body, and Oudinot recovered Borissov and occupied it. On paper it was less than 8,000 men against 50,000, but the mass of the 50,000 were out of it. Only an advanced fraction of them had met the French, and the French had cleared them from the left bank of the river. This local disaster of the Russians was, however, not so complete but that they could destroy the bridge when they had crossed it; and destroy it they did. Napoleon's command by that Sunday evening held all its

own side of the stream, but the immediate means for crossing it had gone.

It was on the Monday that Napoleon heard this double news of success and of peril. It remained to fix upon some shallow where it would be possible to build bridges and so to establish new crossing-places, and to pray that the task might be accomplished and himself and his fragment saved before Wittgenstein should come down from the north to intercept him, or Kutusoff catch him up from the rear. For there must be delay while his forces were still massed upon the eastern bank waiting for the opportunity to pass.

The Beresina is, as I have said, fordable in several places above and below Borissov in all weathers. Even in winter, and after a thaw such as had for some days past ruined the roads and doubled the difficulty of approaching the river, it is passable at half a dozen places within as many marching hours above and below the town. I have no space in this essay to enter into the detail of doubt and of proof as to who finally chose the ford of Studienka (S). It must be enough to say that at this point, some three or four hours' march up-river from Borissov, it was determined to bridge the ford and to save the army. The honor of making that choice and fixing on that

point has been hotly disputed; but the dispute is futile, for it was not the particular spot chosen, but Kutusoff's delay, Wittgenstein's circuitous approach, and, above all, the misleading of Tshitshagov as to the place where he ought to oppose the crossing, which produced the final result, and any other spot that had been chosen would have had the same heavy odds against it, and might have enjoyed the same incalculable luck.

So matters stood upon the Monday night—a bitter night, with a new grip of cold. Though twenty-four hours had thus been allowed Napoleon to bring his last columns another march nearer the river, to organize feints at crossing that should deceive the enemy, and to push up the train towards the ford which had been selected as the scene of that attempt, so slow was the enemy both to the north and to the east of him, under Wittgenstein and under Kutusoff, that neither menaced him as yet. That delay was the first of his unexpected advantages, and counted largely in his salvation.

XXXIV

UPON the Tuesday morning Oudinot reconnoitered the ford of Studienka. The frost had set in again very bitterly: a providential thing for Napoleon, since it made firm the belt of marsh upon either side of the stream. By the afternoon of that Tuesday the sappers were ready, such instruments as they had saved were gathered, and all was prepared both for beginning the cutting of the wood and the building of the bridges, and for establishing those posts at points below the town, ten, twelve, and fifteen miles down-river, where, by a loud pretense of building and the open presence of many men, Tshitshagov should be deceived into believing that a crossing was to be attempted. He was so deceived. All the mass of that great army watched the lower reaches of the Beresina, convinced that there Napoleon would attempt to force his passage, and that there must the Western Russian army be prepared to oppose it on the farther bank. Opposite Oudinot there did not stand—and even so not until it was too late—more than one division.

In the midnight between Tuesday and Wednesday the Emperor, who was bringing up all his columns, sent an urgent message to Oudinot: "If you cannot cross during the night, at least cross in the coming day; it is very urgent." But that message was but one more of so many which had marked the occupation of Moscow and the retreat therefrom. It still took for granted those conditions of order and of physical capacity which had become a habit to the mind of Napoleon, and which had no correspondence to reality. To cut down trees and pull the planks from wooden houses, to establish the trestles amidst the floating ice and upon the marshy bed of the river, to build securely two great bridges of some five hundred yards each in length at least—all this, which a year ago would have been done as the servants of Napoleon had always hitherto executed his orders, with miracles of speed and of aptitude, was now to be attempted by perhaps four hundred men, highly trained indeed, but half-frozen, half-starved, and overshadowed for weeks by the horrors of the Retreat.

Napoleon himself reached Borissov at three in the afternoon of the Wednesday. After now three days, during which he had known but a few fitful hours of imperfect repose, he could no longer

command or organize without rest. He had his camp bed set for him, and he slept right on into the night. It was within an hour of midnight before he wakened and rose.

All this time the wood was felling and gathering, the train was laboriously pushing forward over the snows and the mud. It was eight o'clock on Wednesday morning before the sappers went down into the bitter cold of the stream and began the fixing of the first trestles.

The fierce frost grew deeper and deeper: already in one place and another the Beresina was frozen over with a thin coat of ice, while great blocks of it floated down through the still open water at Studienka Ford. Two bridges were designed, a northern and a southern one. The second, the stronger and therefore the more lengthy in construction, to take the guns and the wagons; the first of lighter build, by which the cavalry and infantry should pass. By one o'clock in the afternoon this first one was finished, but the four hundred men, waist-deep and more in the midst of the stream (all, or very nearly all, marked for a certain death after such an effort), still toiled at the second bridge throughout the afternoon, their drenched clothing freezing upon them whenever they left the water for the bank to fetch new mate-

rial, and now and then one and another falling out exhausted and dying.

Oudinot crossed over by the bridge that had been made, forced back the resistance that the small body of Russians opposite could afford, occupied all he could of the farther shore, and, as the early winter darkness closed in, and as the second bridge was finished, and all the work done, had secured the retreat of the army. Tshitshagov, with his main body far off to the south, did not hear till dawn of the morrow, the Friday, what had happened. Wittgenstein, who, with anything like good scouting, should have discovered it, and should have cut across country for Studienka, was laboriously plodding down to the main road, and marching, though he did not know it, *right round* the bridge builders, and the waiting thousands whom he should have attacked.

Upon that Friday Napoleon crossed somewhere about or just after midday.

It had been suggested to the Emperor that, in so hopeless a task (for this was upon the day before, when the bridges were building and when it seemed impossible that the converging enemies would not annihilate his troops)—it had been suggested, I say, that it was his duty to save his person for the Empire, and for the new European

State. A few trusty Polish lancers would lead him by by-paths through the forests to fords upon the upper river, and, if the army must perish, at least he, upon whom the new Europe depended, would survive to return and to uphold it.

But this suggestion Napoleon thrust from him with anger, and those who attempt to write of this man without understanding the elementary virtues of a soldier may contrast for their instruction his refusal to leave the army while still an obstacle lay before it, and his determination to do so a week later, when it was no longer in peril of capture.

Napoleon then crossed, on horseback, as the majority of accounts tell us; on foot, and leaning on his birchen staff, if we are to trust one of the most veracious of eye-witnesses. Upon such conflicting testimony is history written.

The breakdown of the stronger bridge, the attempted passage upon the Saturday of the first mass of stragglers and of the unarmed thousands, far more numerous now than the organized remnant of the Grand Army, their blundering into the frozen water, their panic and their stampede, their last approach under the very guns of the enemy, and all the dreadful story of the massacre and loss, and of the capture of some thousands that were cut

off when all the regular command had passed and the bridges were destroyed—these have been so often described that I will not tell the tale again. It has been the theme of almost all the great painters and writers who have dealt with the Retreat from Moscow. The military story is rather concerned with the defense of the bridges and with that singular pair of actions which made possible, against all chances and in spite of all calculation, the escape of Napoleon, of his marshals, and of what I have continually called by the name and title at least of the Grand Army.

In the morning of that Friday before Napoleon crossed, Victor, with the covering troops he commanded, arrived in the neighborhood of the bridges upon the eastern bank. He left one division at Borissov, with orders to follow later. It was at the same moment—namely, in the early morning of the Friday—that Tshitshagov, downriver, to the southward on the opposite bank, had news at last of where the French were really crossing, and knew that he must go north to prevent them, if there were yet time. Knowing that, sooner or later, the Russian forces must come up from the south upon this western bank, Ney, in command of the troops which had already crossed,

deployed his forces to cover the head of the bridges from this threatened attack.

That lack of mobility in all the Russian forces which is the chief explanation of what followed, prevented the attack being delivered upon either bank of the stream during that day, Friday. Wittgenstein did, indeed, reach the river bank, but not at Studienka. He cut in between the bridges and Borissov, however, with so much result, that though he had reached the river too low down to interfere with the crossing which was regularly proceeding, he did cut off the body which Victor had left behind in the town of Borissov, and this body—no less than 4,000 men—attempting to escape by a circuitous march in the night, was caught and surrendered.

Tshitshagov, on the other side of the river, came up no farther than Borissov upon that Friday to repair the bridge, so as to be in communication with Wittgenstein; and then, with deplorable leisureliness, the two commanders decided upon the next day, the Saturday, to make a general attack, the one up along the eastern bank, the other up along the western, and each attack aimed at the capture of the bridges and the catching in line of march, and therefore the destruction, of the army that was using them.

It was too late. Already the great bulk of the army had crossed, and during that Saturday, guns and wagons and the great body of unarmed stragglers alone used the bridges.

To protect them, as I have said, Victor remained upon the eastern bank to the south of the bridges, and Ney deployed the bulk of the men who were still armed and organized upon the western bank.

There were fought during that Saturday, simultaneously upon either side of the river, a couple of the most astonishing actions in history. I need not insist, after all that has hitherto been written in these pages, upon the vast disproportion between the numbers. Moreover, the few remaining thousands to whom the double defense was committed—Victor's command upon the one bank, Ney's upon the other—were men reduced in everything which would make a soldier: they had passed through the worst sufferings recorded of men upon the march. Nevertheless, so strongly did the Revolution survive in these men and the traditions of the French service, that Victor all day long barred the great force of Wittgenstein from the eastern bridge end, and this although towards the end of the action the Russian cannon

were playing upon the bridges and the struggling mass which made for them.

Upon the western bank something yet more extraordinary happened, for there Ney counted before sunset 4,000 prisoners and five guns taken from the enemy. It is to be remarked that those who defended the eastern approach under Victor were for the most part not French troops, but drawn from the Allies, and in Ney's triumph upon the western bank perhaps the noblest attitude of all was that of the Swiss division. Its four regiments now counted, all told, but 1,500 men. Throughout the day and all that Saturday night it held the extreme left against the river, the edge of a wood. Recently discovered memoirs, published but a few years ago at Lausanne, give among other details the mournful hymn which these mountaineers, German in speech, sang in the darkness as they fought. When day dawned 300 of those 1,500 answered to the roll, and of those 300, one-third again were wounded men. Such was the spirit which Napoleon, the traditions of the French army, and the legend of a world restored could still inspire.

That same night Victor withdrew his men across the bridges, thrusting his way through the deplorable crowd of disarmed and panic-stricken men.

At half-past eight upon the Sunday morning the general in command of the sappers set fire to the bridges, and such of the great body of stragglers as yet remained upon the eastern bank fell into the hands of the Russians.

Thus was the remnant of the Grand Army saved.

From that moment, though the pursuit was maintained, yet all hope of capturing the Emperor, or of compelling the saved survivors of his command to surrender, was abandoned. The cold increased. The remaining hundred miles or more to Vilna were more terrible in their suffering than anything that had gone before, but the military story of the campaign was ended. Precisely one week after his crossing of the Beresina Napoleon started from Smorgoni for Paris, and reached his capital within the fortnight.

"Some envied him, some praised, a few blamed. But the greater part said that he would return, bringing with him an invincible host, as was his wont, and re-establish the three colors."

THE END

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